

## The Loner – Chapter 1 – Cowboy & Junior

They called him cowboy, those that knew him well; not that he was. It probably had something to do with the dirty old grease-stained Straw hat he wore. Freshly graduated from college in 2000, he soon found that there weren't many jobs available for history majors. He ended up mostly working odd jobs in filling stations or anywhere else they'd hire him for a day, a week or a month. Then, he'd gotten hurt on one of those jobs, seriously enough he came to learn, that he was considered disabled. Funny, he didn't feel disabled, but that small state check warded off starvation. It took him months to regain his strength, but apart from the slight limp, he was his old self. John 'Jack' Summers turned 26 years old on March 1, 2004, and was crippled and down on his luck. Nobody wanted to hire him anymore because of the limp and his only real skill was living off the land.

An only child, his parents had been killed in an auto accident while he was in his junior year at college. He sold their home, barely clearing anything after the loan was paid off and the realtor's commission paid. There was just enough life insurance to see him through college, provided he worked. And then came the realization that he wouldn't be able to get into graduate school and that no one wanted to hire a history major. But, he knew his history and was convinced that Bush's invasion of Iraq, though well intended, was going to have very negative consequences over the long haul. Jack wasn't a liberal, far from it; most of his professors had given him a hard time over his conservative leanings. His wearing of western attire and the old military surplus jeep he drove only added fuel to the fire.

Jack's jeep was his home on wheels and it contained all of his possessions, such that they were. His father had been quite the sportsman in his day and had an impressive gun collection that Jack refused to sell. It included a pre-64 Winchester model 70 in .30-06, a Garand rifle, why he had no idea, and among other weapons, two Remington shotguns, one in 12-gauge and the other in 20-gauge. His father's favorite, a Winchester model 62, had seen a lot of use but was well cared for. His father had purchased the M1911 from the DCM and also had the Ruger .22 pistol he'd bought back when they still had the red logo. When he'd gone through his father's gun storage, Jack learned something about his father he'd never known. It seemed that his father didn't much care for some of the countries gun laws; there was a suppressor for Ruger.

All of the guns were carefully packed away in the jeep and the suppressor was stowed behind the dashboard. It was doubtful that anyone would even notice the gun case because it was buried beneath the mound of camping gear that Jack had also refused to sell. Tired of living in the homeless shelters, Jack had pointed his jeep to the east and departed California heading for the Rocky Mountains. He had to get away from people, he thought, it was just a matter of time before the Muslims expanded their terrorist activities to the US. He followed I-15 to Utah where he picked up I-70 heading towards Denver. He had no particular destination in mind, but Colorado was filled with National Parks and National Forests, so Jack figured he could find some out of the way place to hole up.

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When Jack stopped in Richfield to gas up and pick up some food, a German Shepherd puppy came up to him whining for a handout as he filled his tank. Jack gave the puppy scraps from a sandwich and the puppy latched on to him like he'd just found a new friend. Jack gave the puppy the last scraps from his earlier meal and bought wieners, buns and soda at a grocery store to tide him over until he got to Colorado. When he got back to the jeep, the puppy was anxiously awaiting him. Thinking the puppy might make a good companion, but not wanting to steal some poor kid's new pet, Jack asked around. The service station attendant told Jack the puppy had been around for several days, begging for handouts. Jack loaded the dog and his food in the jeep and resumed his trip.

"Do you have a name?" Jack asked, and received a wagging of a tail in return.

"How about I call you Junior?" Jack suggested. The puppy ignored him and began to root in the bag from the grocery store, looking, apparently, for something to eat. Jack broke open the package of wieners and gave Junior two. Junior wolfed the wieners down and when it became apparent that Jack wasn't about to give him any more, curled up on the passenger seat and fell asleep. A couple of hours later, Jack pulled off I-70 to give Junior a chance to 'do his duty'. The puppy wanted to play more than poop, but finally, Jack got Junior back in the jeep and continued on his way. Jack shared his food with Junior and continued to drive until he got to a rest area near Parachute, CO.

Maybe it was just because Jack woke up early or maybe Junior had just slept all night; either way, Jack fortunately didn't have a mess to clean up when he awoke about dawn. He let Junior out to take care of business and to play. When Junior finally tired, Jack looked at his old road atlas. Just up the road a ways was a town called Rifle and according to the map, a road north into the White River National Forest. The map wasn't much good, it was a 1993 Rand-McNally Road Atlas that didn't give him many details. He was looking for a lake in rugged country where he could slip away from humanity, build a small cabin and try and live off the land.

Jack didn't have a lot of money left when he'd filled up in Grand Junction; he'd started the trip with his meager savings of just under \$1,000, but gas and food had eaten up their fair share and he had a little over \$800 left. Rather than risk not finding a big grocery store near his destination, Jack stocked up on food for himself and Junior. Jack had no idea what to buy the dog, so he asked the store what they sold the most of and bought 4 bags. Jack could get by on about anything, but he figured he'd kill his own meat so he stuck to staples, greatly extending his nest egg. Junior was sniffing the bags and boxes and before they stopped for the night at the rest stop, had torn open a bag of the dog food and helped himself.

The next day, Jack drove up 13 to Meeker and turned off the highway to follow the White River. The map identified a lake named Lake Avery just before Buford. He

couldn't see the lake from the road, but took what he hoped was the correct turn and headed to the north and west. This was as good a spot as any, he figured, and pulled off the road looking for a likely place to camp. Jack found a place to the east and north of the lake and parked the jeep. Junior seemed to like the place all right, or did he just want to play? Jack unloaded the food and pulled out his two tents. He erected the larger of the two to store his food and smaller for him and Junior. He was dying for a cup of coffee and cleared an area for a fire ring and lit a small fire. Jack assumed it would just be a matter of time before some Ranger came along and told him to put out the fire. Strangely, no one came.

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The next day he drove back to Meeker and stopped by the Sheriff's office to get information. He needed to know about vehicle registration and a Colorado Driver's license. Everything could be done right there in Meeker, he was told, but the office was only open on certain Fridays. Realizing he was new to the area one of the Deputies volunteered enough information to keep him clear of the Colorado laws. The local radio station, KAYW gave him a source for area and national news and there were a couple of stations in Rifle. The Deputy also told him that there weren't a lot of jobs in the area and the best he could hope for was some part time construction work.

Jack and Junior started scouting around the area where he was camped and after a few days found an abandoned, falling-down cabin. The cabin was off the beaten path, but accessible by jeep. An old calendar on the wall was for the year 1913, so Jack didn't expect that the owner would be around any time soon to boot him out if he took the place over. He repacked all of his things in the jeep and Junior and he moved to their new home. Despite its dilapidated condition, the old cabin proved to be fundamentally sound. The roof needed to be repaired and a pile of boards suggested where the outhouse might have once stood.

Jack made a trip back into Meeker to get some nails, a square, a hammer and saw. He also picked up an extra 5-gallon can of gas for his small chain saw; he planned to fashion his own lumber as best he could from the plentiful supply of trees. A check with the Sheriff's office disclosed that aside from hunters occasionally using the cabin, no one had a claim on it. The Deputy pointed out that the cabin was on government land and that if Jack tried to occupy it permanently, he'd probably run afoul of the National Park Service.

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It took Jack most of a month to dig a pit for the new outhouse, construct the small building and repair the roof. Junior was left to run and one day Jack heard him barking and went to see what Junior had found. Junior had a squirrel up a tree, but Jack completely ignored his puppy. The small creek where he had been taking his water began right on the spot and the spring was less than 50-yards from the cabin. Junior had no idea why he received extra food that night, but the 4-legged canine garbage disposal cleaned his

bowl. Jack could only hope that the spring ran year around, but he'd have to wait until winter to find out.

When he'd finished the repairs, Jack began to gather firewood. He soon had a huge supply of cut up deadwood and two empty gas cans. Although Jack's food was holding out well, he was tired of beans, rice and pan bread and decided to treat himself to a genuine restaurant meal. He cleaned up, left Junior to guard the cabin and headed to town. His belly full and the gas cans refilled, Jack looked around town to see what he might find to improve the cabin. It being a Friday, Jack took the time to get his jeep inspected and registered with the department of motor vehicles and get a Colorado Driver's License. He ended up spending some of his rapidly disappearing funds on oil lamps, kerosene, blankets and other necessities. Though he'd only been gone a few hours, Junior acted like Jack had deserted him.

The first snowfall of the season caught Jack completely unawares. He didn't listen to the radio much, preferring to save the batteries, but he turned in the Meeker FM station and learned that the snow was expected to continue, on and off, for the better part of a week. He quickly spent the days that he could get out finishing his half-completed smokehouse. Though the area was rich with fishing opportunities, Jack hadn't had time to fish and he needed to lay in a supply of meat if he was going to get through the winter. In Meeker, he'd overheard someone in the café talking about Elk hunting and decided to try his luck finding an Elk; that should keep Junior and him in food for most of the winter.

Maybe it was beginner's luck, but Jack managed to kill a large bull elk with a fine set of antlers. The problem was getting the meat back to the cabin. After he'd skinned and quartered the elk, the quarters were still almost too heavy for one man to carry. He struggled with a front quarter and eventually got it to the cabin, hanging the quarter in his smokehouse to keep it away from Junior. Realizing that he'd never get the hindquarters back to the cabin unassisted, Jack fashioned a sled from leftover lumber from his smokehouse construction project. It still took him the better part of two days to haul the remaining quarters back to the smokehouse.

Exhausted from his work, Jack stood staring at the 4 quarters of meat hanging in the smokehouse. He suddenly realized how ill prepared he was to deal with all of that meat. He had no canning jars and didn't know how to can anyway. Neither was he a butcher, though he thought he could probably manage to cut the elk into useable portions. He'd eaten jerky a thousand times, but had never made any; he was in a real quandary. When in doubt, you ask. The snow was light enough that Jack could make one final trip to Meeker. He found that the retailers were a goldmine of information and soon returned to the cabin with a large supply of plastic bags to store the meat cuts and spices to prepare jerky and smoked meat.

A frozen forgotten pail of water gave Jack an idea and he scrounged around for every empty cardboard box he could find. He lined the boxes with trash bags and filled them from the still running spring. Using the homemade lumber leftover from his earlier con-

struction projects, Jack fashioned a small 12' square building. The next morning, he moved the blocks of ice into the building and insulated them from his large pile of sawdust, also a leftover from his construction projects when he used the chainsaw attachment to saw planks. Jack refilled the boxes with spring water to make more ice for his new icehouse.

Jack had carefully scraped off the extra fat and had cured the hide using a process he'd heard about somewhere called brain tanning. The hide ended up draped over the roof of his new icehouse. Then he manhandled the elk quarters into his cabin and cut the meat as best he could. He made steaks and roasts and cut a lot of the parts he didn't know what to do with into jerky. Junior was in heaven having bones to gnaw on. The steaks and roasts went into the plastic bags and then to the icehouse and the jerky was seasoned and taken to the smokehouse. The whole butchering process took Jack 4 days, but yielded a sizable amount of steaks, roasts, jerky and bones for Junior. Every morning Jack took time to move the new blocks of ice to his icehouse and refill the boxes.

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A second snowfall eliminated any further trips to town for the winter. Junior spent most of his time curled up in front of the fire and Jack worked on several projects to fill the time. One project involved fashioning a set of snowshoes using Aspen and leather cut from the leg flaps of the elk hide that he had cut off and not tanned. Jack found that he could form a long, continuous leather thong by taking a circle of leather and cutting off a narrow strip. Following instructions contained in a book of his father's, Jack fashioned a set of bear paw snowshoes. Modified bear paw would be a better name for Jack's pattern. The Michigan pattern was long and narrow and the bear paw pattern was round. Jack compromised by making the snowshoes narrower than the bear paw, but not as long as the Michigan.

Jack was pretty well set for this winter, the spring hadn't frozen up and it was pretty cold outside, but he wondered how he would get through another year considering his dwindling supply of funds. He figured he could plant a garden and can vegetables to supply a portion of his food needs. But he couldn't grow some necessities like spices, oil, and that always-important commodity, toilet paper. Someone in town had offered to buy his elk quarters or any other wild game he had and that gave Jack an idea. He couldn't hunt animals and sell them, that was poaching pure and simple, but maybe someone would be interested in buying the hide.

The winter passed slowly, but Jack and Junior got out every day. Several times a day as a matter of fact. It helped to pass the time and Junior seemed to be more wolf than German Shepherd. During February, Jack had a visitor; some guy from the National Park Service. He had been warned and had considered this visit to be inevitable. The Park Ranger didn't tell him he had to vacate, but he did set Jack straight on a number of things. His residence in the park was indeed illegal and under normal circumstances, the Ranger told him, he'd be forced to vacate. However, the Ranger said that he had

until spring to get a special use permit. The Ranger figured that there was no way that Jack could accomplish that because they were indeed rare. Approximately 72,000 special use authorizations are in effect on National Forest System lands. These uses cover a variety of activities ranging from individual private uses to large-scale commercial facilities and public services. Examples of authorized land uses include road rights-of-way accessing private residences, apiaries, domestic water supplies and water conveyance systems, telephone and electric service rights-of-way, ski areas, resorts, marinas, outfitter and guide services, and public parks and campgrounds. About 6,000 special use proposals are submitted annually by various entities wanting to use and occupy National Forest System lands.

There was no way that Jack could see that he qualified for a special use permit. But, Jack had the map the Ranger had given him and the closer he looked at it the more he became convinced that his property was just outside of the White River National Forest. The first day he was able, Jack drove to Meeker and sought out an attorney. He explained his problem and the attorney told him that the only way to be certain was to order a survey. Jack almost choked when the attorney told him how much it would cost, but he'd brought an Elk skin to sell and told the attorney to go ahead.

The surveyor showed up and began to determine what was where and who owned it. Jack invited the guy in for an Elk steak and one thing lead to another and the surveyor, a self-employed individual, traded Jack the survey for an elk quarter. Jack was squatting on some land about ½ of a mile outside of the National Forest boundary as it turned out. The Deputy and the Park Ranger both had it wrong. Jack paid the attorney to present his claim to the government and a few weeks later, Jack got a letter confirming that his cabin wasn't in the Forest and a bill from the attorney.

Jack loaded up Junior and drove to town to pay the attorney. He decided to stop by a local eatery and have a regular meal for a change. The café didn't seem to have much of a crowd at that time of the morning and Jack ended up striking up a conversation with his waitress. It was about time for her break and she got herself a cup of coffee and sat down to get to know Jack a little better. Apparently there weren't many prospects in Meeker. Mary was a divorcee and had no children. She wasn't a local girl, Jack found that much out, and she was about his age. Kinda pretty, too.

"Well Junior," Jack said, "It seems like things are looking up. We own our own home, the lawyer is taking care of that, and I just met someone prettier than you."

Junior whined, all he wanted was a doggie treat. Jack was in a particularly good mood, so he stopped by the store and bought Junior a small box of Milk Bones. Giving the surveyor a quarter's worth of frozen elk meat hadn't cut Jack short either. There was still enough in the icehouse to last him until the fall.

## The Loner – Chapter 2 – Mary

Mary's last name was Simmons; Jack had found that out too. It was her maiden name that she'd taken back after her divorce. She hadn't told Jack what had happened in her marriage and he hadn't pried. Mary was what most men would call a 'handsome' woman. Good looking average with an average figure, whatever that is. She was originally from Wisconsin and had moved to Meeker with her husband Steve. Steve had a thing for drinking and when he got boozed up, a thing for the ladies. She caught him shacked up with some broad and had gone straight from the motel to the lawyer's office. The lawyer agreed that there was probably an irretrievable breakdown of the marriage and prepared papers for a special dissolution. The action to restore her maiden name was a separate action because Colorado had no provision to restore the maiden name in the case of dissolution.

Mary had worked ever since they'd moved to Meeker and she just kept her job. She had to find somewhere more affordable to live, but it wasn't much of a step down because Steve had drunk up most of his paychecks anyway. This Jack fella seemed like a nice enough guy. She'd noticed a German Shepherd in the canvas-topped jeep so apparently he had at least one friend. Jack had told her a bit about his background and where he lived. He also told her how he'd lucked out by not being on National Forest property. Wisconsin has a lot of woods and Mary had often gone hunting with her father. Mostly squirrels, plus pheasants in the fall, but she knew her way around a gun.

"Hi Mary," Jack said grabbing a table.

"Hi Jack, what brings you to town?" Mary asked handing him a menu.

"I have an appointment with the lawyer to settle the title to my cabin," Jack explained.

"Is there a problem?" Mary asked.

"Gee, Mary, I hope not," Jack replied. "Give me a Denver omelet, wheat toast and hash browns."

"You want hot sauce with that?" Mary asked.

"I'll pass," Jack smiled.

Mary returned a minute later with the coffee pot to refill his cup.

"What's your dog's name?" she asked.

"Junior," Jack replied.

"Strange name for a dog," Mary observed.

“Found him in Richfield, Utah,” Jack explained. “I don’t know why I decided to call him Junior.”

“Good looking dog from here,” Mary said.

“Sometimes I think he’s part wolf,” Jack replied. “Say there’s no movie theater in town, where do you have to go to see a movie?”

“Rifle or Glenwood Springs,” Mary answered, “You thinking of going to the movies?”

“I was thinking of asking you out,” Jack admitted.

“Long way to go for a movie,” Mary said, “But if you’d like to go out for a drink and dancing, I’m free tonight.”

“Free or affordable?” Jack asked. “Ok, dancing and a drink. But, I’ll warn you right now, I’m not much of a drinking man and I don’t dance so well since I hurt my leg.”

“What happened to your leg?” Mary asked.

“Got it crushed in an accident at work,” Jack said. “I get around ok, but I’m considered disabled, at least partially. Have to wear a brace all of the time.”

“I didn’t realize Jack, maybe going dancing wasn’t such a good idea,” Mary said.

“I’m game if you are, but I never was much of a dancer anyway,” Jack replied.

Mary left and picked up Jack's order. When she returned with the check, she gave him a piece of paper with her address and had written 7:00 below the address. Jack got together with the attorney and cleared up the matter on the cabin. He had a lot of time to kill so he checked out the 2 gun stores in Meeker. He didn’t see anything that he couldn’t live without in either of the stores. He made note of the one that sold surplus ammo in case he needed more at some time in the future for the Garand rifle or the M1911. He figured that he probably should have left Junior at home, but Junior was well behaved and as long as he took him for a walk once in a while, Junior was content to sleep on the passenger seat of the jeep.

Jack was pretty much of a loner. He’d dated a little in college, but wasn’t a member of any frat and mostly applied himself to his studies, especially after his parents had died. He was more than a little nervous when it came time to pick up Mary. Jack found the address, got Junior into the back of the jeep and knocked on Mary’s door. Yes Sir, a mighty handsome woman. Mary suggested a place for them to go and gave Jack directions to get there. They parked and went inside. A live band was going to start playing at 9pm, in about an hour and a half. Jack ordered a draft Colorado Kool Aid (Coors) and Mary did the same.



It turned out that the band didn't play anything that either of them cared for, so Mary suggested that they go back to her apartment and put a movie on TV. When they got there, she told him to take Junior for a walk and bring him into the apartment. It had been obvious from the moment that Mary had first gotten into the jeep on the way to the bar that Junior had taken a liking to her. Apparently, the feeling was mutual. Mary offered to pop some popcorn and told Jack he had a choice of beer, soda or coffee. Jack settled for the coffee. When the movie was over on TV, Jack got up, thanked Mary for a great time and fairly had to drag Junior to the jeep.

Jack didn't really have an excuse to go back to Meeker and winter turned into spring without him seeing Mary again. Then one day, out of the blue, Mary showed up at his cabin. At first Jack thought maybe a bear was moving around in the woods, but Mary came walking down the lane and Junior ran to meet her.

"Hi, Mary, it's nice to see you. What brings you out this way?" Jack asked.

"Considering how far off the beaten path this cabin of yours is, I should think that would be obvious," Mary replied.

"You could have pulled up further," Jack said.

"My car would have never made it over the ruts," Mary explained. "I have some things in my car; care to give me a hand lugging them?"

"What kind of things?" Jack asked.

"Some food," Mary announced, "I thought I'd see if you liked my cooking."

"Well, the cook is easy enough on the eyes," Jack said.

"Flattery will get you everywhere," Mary chuckled mirthfully.

It turned out that Mary had two boxes of food and an overnight bag. Jack looked at the bag but didn't say anything. He didn't know what to say if the truth were known. And, he didn't let his imagination run wild with the possibilities.

"No electricity?" Mary asked.

"This cabin is about as primitive as you can get Mary," Jack admitted. "I don't have running water, indoor plumbing or a refrigerator. There is a lean to off the icehouse that I use for a refrigerator in the summer. But, I do have a battery operated radio."

"This place reminds me of the cabin my dad has in the woods back in Wisconsin," Mary said. "All the comforts of home."

"I've only have one bed," Jack said.

“Ok, I’ll take the bed, where are you going to sleep?” Mary asked.

“I guess I’ll curl up in a corner somewhere,” Jack replied.

“I didn’t intend that you would have to sleep on the floor,” Mary said, “I guess that I’d better drive back to Meeker.”

“I was kidding, Mary,” Jack said, “I have a folding camping cot. Please don’t go.”

“I didn’t realize that you had a sense of humor,” she said, “I took you to be a real loner.”

“I am that,” Jack admitted. “And I really don’t know how to act around women because of that very fact. I dated a little in college but never had what you’d call a steady girlfriend. All I know to do is be polite.”

“Honest, too,” Mary said, “I like that. My first husband was a boozier and a ladies man. You only drank a glass and a half of beer in the two hours we were in the bar and you haven’t made any effort to push our friendship any farther than I want it to go. You’re wrong Jack; you know how to behave around a lady. All it takes is being a gentleman.”

“Is there anything that we need to put in the lean-to to keep cold?” Jack changed the subject.

“Yes,” Mary said, “Let’s sort through the boxes.”

When Jack resurrected the cabin he had to spend some time figuring out the old wood stove. It had a reservoir where he could heat water and he’d eventually figured out how small to split the wood. He had a cast iron skillet and a pot for cooking and very few cooking utensils. He’d seen some of that blue granite enameled table ware and had bought a service of 4 along with a service of 4 in ‘silverware’. The cabin didn’t have a sink, only two large wash pans. As far as modern conveniences went, about the only thing Jack had was Charmin toilet paper in the outhouse. The cabin wasn’t overly lit because there is a limit to how much light you can get from kerosene lamps.

The lawyer had identified who actually owned the property and taken steps to acquire it for Jack. The 2-acre plot included the spring. The lawyer had paid for the property on Jack’s behalf and Jack was now heavily indebted to the lawyer, but the property had been cheap and most of the bill was for legal fees. Jack had to figure out some way to pay that lawyer and he was fresh out of ideas. Most of the money from selling the elk hide had ended up in the lawyer’s pocket as it was. Jack had asked around about those construction jobs the Deputy had mentioned but his limp had warned off any prospective employers. As things stood, the property taxes alone would force him out of his home unless he came up with a good idea about how to make some money.

Time reference: Spring, 2005...

Mary had stayed for the weekend and they'd gotten along really well. Junior positively loved her. As it turned out, Mary was a pretty good cook and Jack decided that he could get used to her cooking really quick. He'd told Mary of his situation with little money and bills and taxes to pay. She'd been reassuring, telling him that things had a way of working out. Colorado Statutes, Title 12, Article 55.5 covers Outfitters. In order to become an outfitter in Colorado, one has to have a First Aid Instructors card, \$50,000 in liability insurance, a \$10,000 Surety Bond and pay a fee. You also have to provide written proof of permission from landowners that you may hunt on their land. It probably helps if you know what you are doing, too. But, beyond that, you need equipment and equipment takes money, something Jack was very short on.

Mary suggested that Jack talk to an outfitter in the area she knew. The guy spent a fair amount of time in the Main Street Café where she worked and she'd have a talk with the guy if Jack wanted. Did he ever. Well, to make a long story short, one thing led to another and Jack ended up with a job. Didn't pay so hot, but he tended the stock and was making enough to save up for his own business. It also got him his First Aid Instructors card at the other guy's expense. Beyond that, he learned the area in that part of Colorado. As an employee, the Outfitter covered the liability and such and Jack needed nothing more than his innate skills.

This story isn't about some Californian moving to Colorado and getting a job. So, we'll skip the part where Jack and Mary got married and get on with the story. Mary moved most of her possessions to the cabin when they got married and the place was wall-to-wall furniture. She even kept her TV although there wasn't any electricity. Between the two of them, they had everything a person would ever need, and more. Mary kept her job at the café and Jack made it through his first season that fall working for the Outfitter as a wrangler. All the time, however, Jack was keeping his eyes and ears open and learning as much as humanly possible.

The state kept the road between Meeker and Buford open, most of the time, and Mary was able to commute to work most days. She took the jeep and left Jack with her old beater. Hunting season didn't last all that long and once winter set in, Jack didn't have anywhere to go anyway. This had been quite a reversal of fortunes for Jack; he'd gone from being a loner with a dog and an old cabin to a married man with a job, albeit seasonal. They had enough money between the two of them to pay off that lawyer in Meeker and that cabin was theirs free and clear. Mary had put that 20-gauge shotgun to good use, too and she proved to be a natural wing shot, better than Jack.

Mary had a cell phone so for the first time since he'd moved to Colorado Jack was in touch with the outside world. However, they only used the cell phone in emergencies, and they had to resort to getting a solar battery charger to keep a charge on the phone's battery. Most of the time, Mary just charged the phone while she was working in Meeker. Even though she'd spent a lot of time in an unimproved cabin in Wisconsin growing up, it was quite an adjustment for Mary. A person gets used to things like indoor plumbing, running water and lights. The location of the cabin didn't lend itself to putting in a

wind turbine, but Mary suggested that they put solar panels on the roof of the cabin and some deep cycle batteries to store electricity. That way, she suggested, they could have lights and maybe even a small electric water heater.

The problem with a small electric water heater, Jack told Mary, was the lack of running water. She suggested that they hunt around for a used water tank and when they had electricity, they could pump water from the spring to the tank. So much for the simple life. Mary knew a lot of people from the café, customers, and she found the used water tank for them. She also came up with a pump and found out where they could get some used piping. Mary had been saving every spare penny she made at the café for a long time and she had that natural way with people that practically guaranteed her a reasonable income in tips. Her savings account had started out pretty fat, but by the time they had the lawyer paid off, it was more like it had been on the Adkins Diet. But between the two of them, and all of the people she knew, spring of 2006 saw Jack up on the roof installing solar panels. He got lucky, the roofline ran east and west and the front door was on the south side of the cabin.

“Do you want to do the honors?” Jack asked.

“Why thank you kind sir,” Mary grinned, as she flipped the switch “Let there be light.”

Jack had installed a 15-gallon Rheem RV water heater, a sink and 4 lights in the cabin. He'd also put in outlets in the kitchen area, bedroom area and one near the fireplace. He was a history major, not a plumber or electrician, but somehow he'd managed to get everything hooked up right and everything worked. Mary suggested that the following year it might be nice to put in a septic system and an indoor bathroom, but Jack couldn't see where a toilet would fit into the cabin. With the electricity, came the small refrigerator, eating up even more floor space.

To back up to Christmas, 2005, they had quite a discussion over what to get each other for Christmas. Jack had found an old Singer treadle sewing machine in an antiques store and bought Mary a sewing machine. It was old and well used, but in working order. Mary had gone to one of the gun stores in Meeker and had bought 'Jack' a good used Winchester model 70 rifle in .30-06. Yeah, like that rifle was for Jack. But, it made a nice addition to his small collection of guns and it had a better scope than the one he'd inherited from his dad. Mary appreciated the sewing machine, but she had a Singer electric stored in the loft. I guess maybe that explains why the house ended up electrified during the summer of 2006.

One thing that didn't get replaced was the wood-burning stove. It and the fireplace were the sole sources of heat for the cabin. Now, as most of you probably know, a fireplace is an inefficient way to heat a house. But, it has been my experience that given a good fireplace and ample wood, you can get a small cabin downright comfortable. Having electricity is a convenience, not a necessity and the same can be said for indoor plumbing. Mary continued to work in Meeker through the summer of 2006 and they saved almost all of her paychecks and lived on the money Jack made working for the outfitter

tending the stock. After the hunting season in 2006, Jack and Mary decided that they needed to lay in a supply of meat to get them through the winter. They got their equipment around and headed out on Saturday morning to hunt for elk.

### The Loner – Chapter 3 – Elk Hunt

You'll just have to accept that this hunt was dangerous for many reasons. In the first place, neither of them had a license to hunt elk. In the second place, the weather turned sour about ten minutes after they'd killed the elk and they were a long way from the cabin. In the third place, they were in the White River National Forest, northeast of the cabin. At least they had sleds to haul the elk out on, so something was going their way. Junior had spotted the elk and braced, alerting Jack to the possibility of game. Jack had spotted the elk and they had hunkered down and watched for a while, determining if the bull was within range. It was, barely, and Jack decided to take the shot. He'd aimed for the neck, figuring to ruin less meat and he'd either kill the bull cleanly or miss entirely.

As luck would have it, Jack's shot put the bull down. Now a single shot will get people's attention, but it's the second shot that will tell them where you are. Jack and Mary skinned and quartered the bull and loaded the quarters on the two sleds. There was enough snow on the ground that the sled would have been easy to pull if it hadn't been for all of the weight. Jack estimated that the bull ran around 750 pounds before he gutted it. Mary's sled must have had between 250-300 pounds on it and Jack's was heavier because he had the hide. You will probably say that Jack and Mary were poachers, and I'll not split hairs with you. But, they viewed it as subsistence hunting. And, here they were, 2 miles or more from the cabin, with a lot of meat to haul and the weather going bad on them.

Junior led the way, pausing for Jack and Mary to keep up. What had been an hour's walk from the cabin took them 4 hours on the return trip. By the time they got back to the cabin, the snow was really coming down. No sooner had they gotten back to the cabin than Junior had taken off, probably to finish eating the offal Jack had left lying. Mary called the café on the cell phone and they told her that a blizzard was blowing in and that they'd understand if she didn't make it to work the following week. The two of them spent the rest of the day and well into the night cutting and packing the meat from the elk. By that time, Junior was back, apparently haven eaten his fill. His belly fairly bulged, that much was certain. Mary helped Jack haul wood to the house and they moved quite a bit of wood to the front porch in case they couldn't get out.

"If you're going to be a successful guide, you're going to need to check the weather reports before you go hunting," Mary told Jack.

"I did check the weather report, honey, that's why we went hunting," Jack explained. "I saw that front coming in and I figured that we wouldn't have any problem with a park Ranger or a Game Warden."

"Well, you cut it a bit too close for my liking," Mary replied. "At least we have meat to last us for a while, although I'd have thought that you'd have wanted to age the meat some before cutting it up."

“If the weather hadn’t gone south on us worse than I’d have imagined,” Jack explained, “I would have. As it is, I’ve got to get a fire going in the smokehouse for the jerky and I’m not so sure that I want to try and fight the storm to do that.”

“I’ll give you a hand,” Mary offered, “Then we can snuggle up and wait out the storm.”

That was the best offer Jack had all day and he took her up on both parts. Jack hadn’t seen TV in a long time until they gotten the electricity up and running. Then, he saw an ad on TV and by golly if that woman didn’t look just like Mary. Her name was Kathy Ireland, just your average good-looking woman, right? 1995 marked the twelfth year Kathy had been a Sports Illustrated swimsuit model (including magazine covers in 1989, 1992, and 1994). For the statisticians among you, her measurements are 34B-24-34, she’s been married once to the same man (a doctor) since 1988 and has 3 children. Ireland was a little older, having been born in 1963, but the resemblance was remarkable.

The cabin stayed warm while the snow blew and the wind howled around them. Even Junior seemed reluctant to venture outside for any longer than it took for him to take care of business. That snowstorm, blizzard, in late October of 2006 was a precursor of things to come. They had several severe snowstorms that winter and Mary ended up being home as often as she made it to work. Surprising, she didn’t end up pregnant and she made an appointment with the doctor to get checked out. The doctor told her that he couldn’t find anything wrong with her and it fell to Jack to have some tests run. That was when the problem surfaced and the doctor told them not to expect any children. The problem, he said could be exposure to solvents or something as simple as chemicals in the water. They took a water sample from the spring and it was clear so apparently the problem had arisen sometime earlier in Jack’s life.

Jack took his reproductive problems hard, but there was nothing he could do about it. Mary was very accepting of the fact that they probably wouldn’t have any children and he came to count his blessings. During the summer of 2007, Jack had the opportunity to buy out the outfitter he worked for. The guy had some health issues and no children to follow in his footsteps. Or, did children do that anymore? They still didn’t have a lot of money to spend, but the outfitter was looking more for a reasonably steady stream of income than a lump sum cash settlement and they managed to arrive at a deal. Paying off the outfitter didn’t really leave them with any more disposable income than Jack had been earning, but he was building equity in the business. He took that as a sign that from now on he’d be better off buying beef than harvesting his own meat.

All this time, a goodly share of Mary’s income had been going into savings. She was able to bank all of her tips and about ½ of every paycheck. These savings were Jack and Mary’s emergency fund and buying out that outfitter wasn’t an emergency. Now that they had TV service, Jack began to pay more attention to what was going on in the world around him. He barely knew that the US had been involved in that war in Iraq and he didn’t bother himself with things that he thought didn’t concern him. Mary could have told you anything you wanted to know about the world situation. You couldn’t work in a popular café and not hear people discussing world affairs. Jack didn’t ask and she didn’t

talk about what she was hearing. Maybe it was some sort of communications breakdown, but Jack was a good husband and treated her like a lady and she wasn't about to tell him unless he asked.

They'd solved the indoor toilet problem by building another lean-to, this time off the cabin. It wasn't much of a bathroom, a tub, sink and stool, but what more did you need in a bathroom? They added a second 15-gallon hot water heater to the bathroom, but only turned it on when they wanted to bathe. Everything in that cabin was a balancing act, given the limited amount of electricity. If you wanted to bathe, you turned off the kitchen hot water heater and turned on the bathroom hot water heater. But what the hell, it beat going to an outhouse or bathing at the kitchen sink or in the old fashioned bathtub, another acquisition from an antiques store.

In the fall of 2007, just before hunting season, they hauled the treadle powered Singer and the old bathtub to an antique store in Glenwood Springs and got back most of what they'd paid in the first place. Getting back to the world news, Jack was wondering what had happened to the world since he stopped paying attention right after he'd graduated from college over 7 years before. He'd gotten caught up in paying attention to his own needs and until Mary came into his life, hadn't really cared. And by that time, he had a job and when he did have time, preferred to read rather than watch TV.

Colorado is subject to tornadoes every year. Virtually all of the severe tornadoes occur east of the Rockies, but the tornado watches and warnings sometimes spread a good distance west. Mary, being from Wisconsin, was concerned about the danger the storms represented. Jack tried to persuade her that the greatest danger they faced was the snowstorms, but Mary kept asking if he started the storm shelter yet. Jack finally found it easier to dig the hole than argue with the wife. He got lucky when a hunter who used the Outfitting service every year told him he had a job in Rifle that involved using a backhoe. They got the guy a trophy kill on the first day out and the guy was so happy and excited that he offered to have the backhoe hauled up to Jack's cabin and a hole dug if Jack would pay for the gas. So that was how Jack came to have the hole for the storm shelter.

Mary was less than satisfied having a hole in the ground and she got a local from Meeker to put in a foundation and slab and erect block walls. When the storm shelter was finally covered over, she dug some of her stored furniture out of the loft and they moved it to the shelter. She had the shelter completed using only some of her tip savings. It wasn't much, only a storm shelter, so the place wasn't set up for an extended stay.

Not having a child of her own bothered Mary though she was reluctant to say anything for fear of hurting Jack. When he mentioned, in an offhand way, the possibility of adopting a child, she could barely contain her joy. They had a reasonable amount of savings and while their home wasn't modern, it had all of the necessary comforts. They contacted an adoption agency after the fall 2007 hunt and filled out the mound of papers. They



were told that getting an infant might take forever, but if they were willing to take an older child, their chances of adopting increased dramatically.

Jack didn't care one way or the other; he wanted a son to follow in his footsteps. Mary, of course wanted a daughter. By the spring of 2008, their background checks were complete and the adoption agency told them that they had two children, fraternal twins, boy and girl, whose parents had been killed in an auto accident, who needed foster care. There were no relatives to take the children in this case. Now the upside to providing a foster home is that you get paid and the downside is that you have to go through a whole different round of screening. Mary and Jack agreed to take the twins and the bureaucracy shaved of a tiny bit off the time it usually took to approve foster parents. Not much, but a little.

The children, Robert and Elaine, had been with a sitter and their parents had been out for the evening to celebrate their 7th Anniversary. They'd been broadsided by a drunk driver and killed instantly. While the kids had been spared the horror of actually being in the accident, they just didn't understand why Mommy and Daddy would never be home. The twins were just under 5 years old in the early summer of 2008 when they came to live with Mary and Jack.

When it appeared that they were going to get Bobbie and Lane, Mary put on a big push to add to the cabin. They extended it to the west, adding 2 bedrooms and another small bath. The additional roof area provided space for more solar panels and they finally had enough electrical capacity to properly supply the cabin. However, with the new addition, the cabin was beginning to look more like a house than a cabin. They overcame one space problem by moving the battery bank from the cabin to the shelter. The old wood stove was retired and replaced by an electric stove and the fireplace had an insert installed. People sometimes call these Franklin Stoves.

Mary gave notice on her job because she figured that being a new mother was going to be a fulltime job. That mostly affected their savings program, but the two of them were in for a real surprise. The cost of raising 2 children is a lot more than the state pays you for 2 foster children. And if that weren't enough, the jeep died and the cost of resurrecting it wasn't worth it. Jack was forced to buy a pickup. He got a good used 6-passenger diesel and put it in the name of the business. Mary's old clunker was about on its last legs too, but there was no way that they could afford 2 cars in the same year.

The upside to Mary being home fulltime was that she went ahead and put in a garden. The downside to having 2 new youngsters was that she was pressed to find time to weed that garden. There was a phone company line on the road between Meeker and Buford and they finally gave in and put in a real phone. Welcome to the 21st century, folks. In 4 short years, Jack had gone from being a loner with a dog living in an unimproved cabin to being a married man with 2 children and a businessman. And, the kids were 5-year-olds to boot, well almost.

"You aren't my Daddy," Robbie announced a few days after the kids arrived.

“No, I’m not your Daddy, Robbie,” Jack agreed. “Your Daddy had to go home to Heaven with your Mommy. Mary and I are just helping your parents out.”

“They were killed in a car wreck,” Robbie said. “What’s a car wreck?”

“You know when 2 cars run into each other and the cars get broken and the people inside of the cars get hurt,” Jack tried to explain.

“Why didn’t the man who was driving the other car get hurt?” Robbie asked.

“That just seems to be how these things happen Robbie,” Jack said, at a loss to explain that the drunk usually survived the crashes.

“It isn’t fair,” Robbie said.

“No, it isn’t fair Robbie,” Jack agreed, “But we shouldn’t question God’s plan for things.”

“Why not?” Robbie asked.

“That’s a very hard question to answer, Robbie,” Jack said. “God has a plan and He doesn’t tell us what the plan is. He tells us to trust Him. That trust is what we call faith.”

“I don’t get it,” Robbie said.

“Don’t feel bad, Robbie, neither do I,” Jack smiled. “But, it seems to work ok.”

Ever try to explain something to a kid? It’s hard enough when it’s your kid and you’ve had 4½ years to get ready. It has to be a whole lot different when it is an inquisitive youngster trying to figure out the meaning of life and death and why his/her world has been suddenly turned upside down. Too much information is as bad as not enough information, too. Jack and Mary weren’t churchgoers, it was a drive to town and in the winter it was especially hard. Both were God fearing Christians, if that means anything. But, after his folks had been killed in their car accident, Jack had drifted away from going to church. Robbie’s questions were especially poignant because a drunk driver who had survived the accident had also killed Jack’s parents.

The kids’ date of birth was August 12, 2003 and that left Jack and Mary barely 6 weeks to figure out what to get them for their birthdays. They seemed to have outgrown their clothes, so clothing was definitely on the list. However, a birthday just wouldn’t be right if the child didn’t get something to play with, especially children who were just turning 5. Jack didn’t have a clue what to get the kids and talked to Mary about it. She said she had a few ideas and would take care of it, this time.

Instant motherhood or fatherhood is not without its challenges. It’s hard enough raising your own children, but taking on someone else’s presents unique challenges. Some-

times there's a clash of value systems; other times there are scars to heal. You can be sure that by the time a child has reached 5, he or she has learned 6 words, who, what, why, where, when and how. And at age 5 the child hasn't learned the most important quality of all, patience. But, if you're going to be a parent, it's something that you're going to need plenty of.

I mentioned tornadoes as the reason why Mary insisted on having a storm shelter. What I didn't mention was the number one hazard facing residents of the western slope beside snow. That danger is fire. During 2004, the White River office only handled 2 local fires totaling 6 acres. But, the danger is always there. And, depending on where you go in the area, during the winter there is always a danger from falling snow. Not snowfall, falling snow as in avalanche. Every place has its own sets of hazards, but you don't always think about them until you become responsible for a couple of inexperienced human beings who don't really know how to take care of themselves. Life is tough, but with Robbie and Lane there, it just got a whole lot tougher.

So what does all of this have to do with survival? Got to set the stage and introduce the characters. Lane fairly clung to Mary as if Mary could somehow bring her mother back. Didn't help much, but Mary did her very best to be someone that Lane could count on. What more can you do? Anyway, the world news, now that Jack was finally paying attention to it, didn't look all that good. The Middle East was still a hotbed of discontent, meaning that nothing had changed there since Jack was a little boy. 9/11 had gone down while Jack had been at loose ends and he pretty much ignored all of the hubris that followed. It wasn't that he didn't care as much as it was that he didn't worry about things over which he had no control.

Lane and Robbie changed his attitude quickly. Not only did he have to concern himself with tornadoes and forest fires and avalanches, he had to provide for Mary, the kids and himself in case TSHTF, so to speak. Well, he had a Garand rifle, an M1911 and that suppressed Ruger. That was probably enough firepower. Besides, they had a couple of shotguns and a couple of hunting rifles plus the model 62 Winchester. One day when he was in Meeker, he picked up 3 ammo cans of the Korean surplus that came 376 rounds to the can. He also picked up 250 rounds of 230 grain .45 auto and 4 extra magazines. He added a WW II ammo belt and 2 clip pouches plus a pistol belt and flap holster. Jack figured that was all he'd ever need. They had a fair supply of .30-06 hunting ammo and if push came to shove, he could strip the rounds out of the 8-round clips and use them in their model 70's. Well, he did pick up an assortment of shotgun shells and a few bricks of .22 LR, but not many, because he only had the .22 pistol and rifle.

Mary decided to try her hand at canning the extra produce from her garden and they ended up storing the food in the storm shelter for want of space. On many Saturday mornings, she'd get Lane and the two of them would hit garage sales looking for quart jars. She'd picked up a pressure cooker and a large boiling pot that she could use to can green beans and the like for next to nothing. Jars were harder to come by and she ended up needing to buy a few from the store along with lids. I say try her hand at canning because Mary's mother had never canned, at least not for as long as she could

remember. It turned out to be not all that hard, especially since she'd picked up a book on canning from one of the jar manufacturers.

## The Loner – Chapter 4 – Family Issues

“Jack, we need to talk about what we’re going to do if we have some kind of emergency,” Mary suggested.

“Ok, hon, I figured if there’s a fire you’ll probably jump in the car and get out of here,” Jack said. “If we get a bad snow storm, we should all be together and between what you’ve canned this year and what we have on hand we should be ok. I don’t think that we really have to worry much about tornadoes or avalanches here in this area.”

“That pretty much covers natural disasters,” Mary said, “But what if the US has another terrorist event?”

“Aw, Mary, we haven’t had one since the World Trade Center,” Jack replied. “I don’t think that is very likely.”

“Then why did you buy extra ammo and stuff when you were in town last week?” Mary asked.

“I could be wrong, you know,” Jack said. “I don’t really believe that any terrorists would end up here in this area anyway. That Garand of my Dad’s is the only military rifle we have. I suppose that I should teach you how to operate that rifle, just in case. It isn’t hard, but you have to be careful of catching your thumb in the action. That results from the fully sprung bolt’s smashing your thumb under many hundreds of pounds of pressure, as the follower is depressed to close the rifle. Unless your hand is properly positioned, your thumb could end up bruised or even broken.”

“Didn’t they replace the Garand with another rifle based on that design that had a removable magazine?” Mary asked.

“That was the M14, hon,” Jack said. “It’s a different cartridge and our .30-06 ammo wouldn’t work in it. Besides, they’re pretty expensive. You can get the civilian version called the M1A from Springfield Armory, but you’re looking at over \$1,000 for the rifle and a lot for the magazines. If I were convinced that we ran the slightest chance of needing one of those rifles, I’d buy it.”

Mary had listened to a lot of people talking in the café over the years and she didn’t know that she exactly agreed with Jack on this particular point. To hear some of those men talk, the US faced anything from suitcase nukes to an invasion by the United Nations. It wasn’t a priority, but the next time she went to Meeker, she checked both gun stores. Neither of the stores was an authorized SA dealer, but they had access to the rifles through distributors. Jack had been right about the price though and she decided to let it go for the moment. She told both dealers that if they ever got a used M1A in on trade to give her a call. Then, she promptly forgot about it because what were the odds on someone who actually owned an M1A wanting to sell it?

It seemed that they couldn't keep Lane and Robbie in clothes. For their birthdays, they had gotten clothes a size too large, but they were already outgrowing them. Christmas meant more clothes and of course the inevitable toys. Mary's folks hadn't made it to Colorado for the wedding and they said that they would be out for Christmas to meet Jack and see the kids, weather permitting. Mary told her mother what sizes to get for the kids and that they could put them up by giving their bedroom. Mary's Mom said that was foolish, they'd just get a room in Meeker.

Fortunately the weather did permit and Paul and Janice Simmons showed up a few days before Christmas. After a day or so of getting to know each other and seeing all of the improvements that had been made to turn the cabin into a home, Paul took Jack aside.

"Those are a couple of pretty nice kids, Jack," Paul said. "I was sorry to hear that Mary and you couldn't have any, but you could do a lot worse than adopting those two."

"Mary and I've talked about it a little, Paul," Jack admitted. "It's been quite an adjustment going from no kids to 2 five-year-olds."

"From what I've seen so far, the two of you are doing fine," Paul said. "Even if you have your own, they don't come with an instruction book. Say, I noticed that you don't really have that storm shelter very well stocked. It probably wouldn't hurt for you to lay in a little more food and such. I've got to tell you, I don't much like what I see of the world situation."

"I didn't pay much attention to it until recently, Paul," Jack admitted. "I don't like some of the stuff I hear on the news, but frankly, I'd be a lot more worried about a natural disaster than terrorists or anything like that. Besides, out here on the western slope, I can't believe that we'd be in any trouble even if terrorists did attack the US."

"You're probably right, Jack," Paul agreed, "At least you aren't dependent on outside electricity or fuels. I'm surprised that you don't have a tank like most farms for diesel fuel."

"Mary's car uses gas and my truck uses diesel," Jack said. "That's why I didn't put in a tank, but I don't suppose it wouldn't hurt. Lord knows I end up burning enough diesel fuel that I could probably save a little money if I had a tank."

"One other thing, Jack," Paul said, "and excuse me if I'm presumptuous, but, I think that Mary and you ought to get to church more often. Kids need to be raised in a church. Then, when they get old enough, they can choose a church of their own. How are they going to know about God and religion unless you get them some exposure?"

"I hadn't given that much thought," Jack replied. "I guess that's one more thing I'd better talk to Mary about."

"I think you done a marvelous job fixing up the cabin," Paul said, "It's a whole lot like the one we have in Wisconsin. When I get home, I think I might put in solar panels myself. It seems like every time we get a good storm, the cabin loses power."

"Mary, have Jack and you talked about adopting Lane and Robbie?" Janice asked.

"We've talked about it but haven't made a decision yet, mom," Mary answered.

"They're such lovely children and you couldn't ask for better behaved kids," Janice continued. "If it were up to me, I'd get the papers started for adoption right away."

"I'll talk to Jack about it," Mary replied.

"Your father seems to like Jack well enough," Janice said. "I think he's having a talk with him about adopting the kids and some other things."

"Like what?" Mary asked.

"If you're going to raise kids, they need to go to church for one thing," Janice said. "And you know how your father is about survival things. You don't have much food in your shelter if some kind of trouble comes up. Did I tell you Paul bought some more guns?"

"What did Daddy buy?" Mary asked.

"He bought 2 HBAR AR15's and a Super Match M1A," Janice said. "I swear, he has enough ammunition to fight a war."

"I talked to both guns stores about a M1A," Mary explained, "But they're so expensive. They said they'd call me if they got a used one in."

"That's foolishness, Mary," Janice said. "Who in their right mind would sell a M1A rifle? I'll mention that to your father."

Paul and Janice Simmons weren't rich, but neither were they poor. Paul had a really good job working for a company in Madison and over the years had built up a substantial 401k plan. He was due to retire in a couple of more years and their home was paid for. Janice had not worked outside the home because she hadn't needed or wanted to. Paul was quite the sportsman and had a sizeable gun collection. He'd made sure when Mary was growing up that she was familiar with guns and knew how to hunt. Once they had their home paid for, Janice and he just kept making house payments only this time the money went into a money market account. He could write a pretty sizable check if he needed to for any particular reason.

That night Jan and he compared notes about the foster kids, getting Jack and Mary started back up in church and Jan mentioned that Mary had been in Meeker looking at M1A rifles. She told him that he should have bought 2 and he could have given one to

Jack and Mary. Paul wasn't the sort of man you threw down the gauntlet on. The day after Christmas, he took Mary to Meeker and ordered a rifle just like his and 10 of those 20-round magazines. Paul had the SA9805 Super Match, which included the McMillan Marine Corps camo fiberglass stock and the Douglas stainless steel barrel. He'd added a Harris bipod to the rifle. He'd also added a suppressor even though they were illegal in Wisconsin. It was the model with the quick detach mount. He also bought her the same scope that he had, the Leupold Mk IV 6.5-20x50mm BDC. He planned to take care of the suppressor when he got back to Wisconsin, but it would be up to Mary to get the quick detach mount installed. He managed to spend around \$5,000 before he got out of the gun store and he hadn't bought any ammunition. But, he could afford it and he wanted to do it, so he did.

Paul explained to Mary that he would be sending an accessory for the rifle that was probably legal in Colorado, but wasn't in Wisconsin. He told her that it was up to her to get the suppressor installed and buy ammo for the rifle. He also explained that this particular rifle was danged accurate and that if anything the suppressor only improved the accuracy. He therefore recommended that she limit herself to buying match grade ammunition, preferably from someone like Black Hills Ammunition or Hornady who put out nice 175gr BTHP cartridges. He recommended that she buy no less than 500 rounds of each and preferably more of the hollow point rounds.

It was awfully nice of her Daddy to buy her/them that rifle, but it put Mary on a spot. She wasn't quite sure to explain to Jack how her Daddy had just plunked down 5 grand for a rifle like it was nothing at all. Especially since Jack didn't seem to think that they really needed what he would most certainly take to be another military style rifle.

"Mary, I was talking to your father before Christmas and he seems to think that we should do more to stock the shelter with food," Jack said one night after Paul and Janice had left for Madison. "I suppose he's right, what do you think?"

"Daddy is a bit of a survivalist, you know," Mary said. "And he really keeps up on the news, so I don't suppose it would hurt anything. What else did Daddy say?"

"He suggested that I put in a tank for diesel fuel and I'm going to do that," Jack said. "I can get enough off buying in bulk to make it worthwhile. He was big on the idea of our adopting Robbie and Lane and even said that we ought to start going to church."

"Mom and he must have been comparing notes Jack, I got the same lecture," Mary laughed. "Jack you remember that Daddy took me to town that one day?"

"Yes, what about it?" Jack asked.

"He bought me/us a rifle," Mary said.

"Let me guess, he bought you one of those M1A's," Jack replied.



“Well...yes, but not one of the standard M1A’s. He got me what he bought for himself a while back,” Mary explained.

“He told me about that rifle, a Super Match wasn’t it?” Jack asked.

“Yes, with a bipod and a scope and 10 20-round magazines,” Mary announced. “And he said that he was sending us a Suppressor when he got home. He said I/we’d have to get it mounted and that we needed to buy match grade ammo.”

“I surprised that he didn’t buy you a couple of AR15’s too while he was at it,” Jack said.

“You’re not mad are you?” Mary asked.

“Over someone buying us a \$5,000 rifle?” Jack smiled. “Of course not. Get some 5-round magazines for it and we can use it for hunting, too.”

“How did you know how much it cost?” Mary asked, suspiciously.

“I was in town one day and priced one of them, the same as you did,” Jack said. “So, are we going to adopt Lane and Robbie and start going to church, or what?”

You might think that’s a little farfetched, but stop and think about it. Paul and Janice had plenty of money, Mary was an only child and they really liked Jack. Hell, I wouldn’t be too surprised if Paul didn’t go out buy a couple of AR15’s with M4-FA suppressors and about 30 of those 30-round Teflon magazines and ship the whole mess up to Colorado, would you? Don’t be, he did. Some people hold onto their money like they’re going to take it with them when they die. Some people are generous to a fault and others are generous as long as they buy you something they wouldn’t mind having themselves; otherwise, they plan to take their money with them. Paul is a lot like my father, by the way, and he fell into the latter category. The thing was, my Dad never bought me a gun. He gave me one, but he never, ever bought me one.

After the first of the year, 2009, Mary and Jack applied to adopt Robbie and Lane after they had a chance to talk it over with the kids. That discussion was in the vein of, “Would you like to stay with us permanently? We aren’t your Mommy and Daddy, but we sure would like it if you’d stay with us.” The kids were mostly sure and the adoption agency would no doubt run them through some psychological evaluations to make certain they were adjusting from the loss of their parents and really wanted to live with Mary and Jack.

[By the way, don’t go looking for a lot of fancy military hardware. The only way any of that will turn up is if TSHTF and they end up killing someone who happens to have an M16 with a M203. This is just your typical family living in Colorado who happens to have a rich father/father-in-law.]

They had a fair number of churches to choose from in Meeker. There were several Baptist churches, a Stake Center, an Assembly of God, a Lutheran Church (Missouri Synod), a couple of Seventh Day Adventist churches, etc. Mary had been raised in the Lutheran Church and her church wasn't part of the Missouri Synod. She told Jack that she'd pass on that particular church. Jack had been raised a Methodist and there was a Methodist church so they decided to give that a try. Meeker was heavily loaded up with a variety of 'Fundamentalist' churches. Maybe that represented the nature of the community with people who worked close to the earth. It probably didn't make a nickel's worth of difference anyway. But they didn't feel adventurous and decided on the United Methodist Church. People seem to be possessive on their particular brand of being a Christian, for whatever reason. Do different churches believe in different Gods?

With the sudden influx of weaponry, Jack decided that he had to do something to provide security for their weapons. Having 2 inquisitive 5 year olds around made it all the more important. He picked up a gun safe in Meeker and stored all of the weapons out of reach. They were pretty well loaded for bear or anything else that came their way. 3 .30-06 rifles, a .308 rifle, 2 5.56 rifles, 2 shotguns, a .22 rifle, and 2 handguns. Jack added a diesel fueled DGBB 32kw generator even though they depended exclusively on solar energy for their electricity. He also added a 300-gallon diesel fuel tank up on legs to fuel his pickup. He left the decision about food up to Mary and she asked around. One thing they hadn't added to their home equipment was a computer, although they were talking about getting one for the kids.

Someone who Mary knew from the café suggested that they consider Walton Feed and lay in a store of those foods packed in 6-gallon pails and stored in nitrogen. Contrary to what some people tell you, when you add an oxygen absorber to a pail of grain, the oxygen is removed, leaving nitrogen, not carbon dioxide. There was other equipment to buy, too like a grain mill and a water purifier in case the spring got fouled. By the time they were done in the fall of 2009, they had your average survivalist setup. The adoption agency approved the adoption and the court in due course approved it. Lane and Robbie were now their children. Jack and Mary suggested that since the kids would be living with them from now on, they use the name Summers, not wishing to press the issue. Lane did so immediately, but Robbie held back.

Then, at their 6th birthday party, Robbie announced that he wanted the same last name as his sister and said they could call him Robbie Summers from now on. It was a minor victory, but Jack and Mary didn't overreact. There were bigger fish to fry than worrying about names. The twins were starting school this year, having been held back a year to allow them to adjust to the loss of their parents. Lane and Mary were inseparable and Robbie wouldn't let Jack out of his sight.

Just when it looked like everything couldn't get any better the phone call from Wisconsin came. Although he'd been the picture of health, Paul had pancreatic cancer and had less than 6 months to live. Pancreatic cancer has a 12-month term, start to finish. Usually by the time it's diagnosed, it's too late to treat. The 1-year survival rate for patients who receive treatment is only 3%. The 5-year survival rate is basically zero. They

dropped everything and went back to Wisconsin. Paul was in good spirits, considering, and before they left, he handed over his extensive gun collection to Jack and Mary. Janice suggested that when the time came, she was going to sell the cabin and their home and move to Colorado.

## The Loner – Chapter 5 – How Time Flies

“Dang, I don’t know that this gun collection of your father’s will fit in our gun safe,” Jack observed.

“Mom said that she was moving the gun safes out here when she moved,” Mary explained. “You’ll just have to crowd them up for now and when she gets here, you can put two gun safes and all of the military style rifles in the shelter. And, don’t cuss, it’s not good for Lane and Robbie to hear you cussing.”

“Was your Dad into cowboy guns?” Jack asked.

“Why?” Mary wanted to know.

“Well, he has 4 Winchester 94’s, a .22LR, a .22WRM, a 30-30 and a .375 Winchester,” Jack explained.

“Oh, he bought all four of those guns at the same time, I think,” Mary said. “That was back in about 1979 or 1980. There should be some Ruger single action revolvers, too. I think he bought a Bearcat, a Single-Six, a Blackhawk and a Super Blackhawk.”

“I found those, but they don’t look like they’ve been fired very much,” Jack said, “They have very little wear and are in the original factory boxes, the same as the Winchester’s.”

“Daddy collected as much as he bought guns to shoot,” Mary explained. “Anyway, we have enough guns for ourselves and the kids when they grow up. I wouldn’t mind having the Browning Hi-Power to carry, if it’s ok with you.”

“Just how many guns are there here?” Jack asked.

“Well, I’d guess maybe 40 counting the ARs and the Super Match,” Mary said. “But you’re just going to have to count them, because when he got on a buying streak, he sometimes got carried away.”

“How on earth did he come up with those suppressors?” Jack asked. “And why would we want to use a suppressor anyway?”

“Daddy claims that using a suppressor is better than using a flashhider, Jack,” Mary said. “As to where he bought them, it’s anybody’s guess. You can figure that they’re not on anybody’s books because you can’t own a suppressor in Wisconsin.”

“I guess it was worth it renting that U-Haul trailer, Paul must have had 50,000 rounds of ammunition,” Jack shook his head.

“Daddy had a rule that for a military type weapon you needed 5,000-rounds and for everything else at least 1,000,” Mary continued to explain. “He was/is a died in the wool survivalist and he had the money to spend.”

“I sure don’t have any trouble believing that, hon,” Jack said. “I’ll put all of Paul’s guns down in the shelter for now and we’ll just padlock the place so the kids don’t get into them. Do you think we need to get some steel shelving for that shelter? Between the food and the guns and everything else, it’s just stacked full. I don’t know if we could find room if we needed to use it.”

“I suppose we should, Jack,” Mary agreed. “I’ll get Lane and Robbie dressed and we’ll go to town with you when you turn in the trailer. You can drop us off and I’ll get some shelves while you’re turning the trailer in.”

“I’m not sure how were going to pay for everything,” Jack muttered.

“We’ll have plenty of money once I deposit this check,” Mary said.

“What check?” Jack asked.

“Mom wrote us a check to cover our traveling expenses,” Mary said, reluctant to explain further.

“How big of a check did she write?” Jack asked, surprised by Mary’s reticence.

“\$2,500,” Mary reluctantly announced. “But she said that it was to cover the rental on the trailer and a few things we’d undoubtedly need once we got home.”

“She had that right, but can they afford to spend the money?” Jack asked. “They have all kind of medical bills they’re going to have to pay.”

“Daddy has really good health and life insurance coverage and he bought one of those cancer policies,” Mary replied. “So, money isn’t going to be a problem for Mom. Besides, she’ll have Daddy’s pension and that 401k. I would imagine she’ll even start drawing Social Security when she’s able.”

“Get the kids and let’s get this trailer turned in,” Jack suggested.

On the way to town, Mary asked how many sets of shelving to buy and he suggested that she pick up 12. That would hold the food they had and leave them some for incidentals. It turned out that the shelving was on sale and Mary got 15 units for the price of 12 units at regular price. It wasn’t like they couldn’t use it and when they got home she offered to help Jack set up the shelving after the kids went to bed. Jack used toggle bolts and firmly attached it to the concrete block walls when they set up the shelving later that evening. They worked long into the night and by the time they were done, all 15 sets of shelving were assembled, anchored and the food stored.

It wasn't but 3 months later that Janice called to say that Paul had passed away. In keeping with his wishes, he had been cremated and she wasn't going to bother with a Memorial Service. They'd already sold the cabin, she said, and they'd listed the house when Paul had gotten really bad and had been hospitalized. Could they see about buying her a piece of land somewhere near them so she could spend time with her grandchildren? Mary told her Mom that they find some land for her and asked if she knew what she wanted to put on the place. Janice said something just like the cabin they had in the Wisconsin woods, but totally energy independent.

They drove into Meeker and talked to the lawyer who'd handled Jack's cabin acquisition. Was the other two acres that adjoined their property available for sale, they asked? The lawyer said that he thought so, but he'd have to check. After that, they went to a place called Lost Creek Log, a building contractor, and talked to them about building a cabin. Mary described the Wisconsin cabin as best she could and the fella said he see about getting some floor plans together. They told him that they didn't have the land yet and that the home was for her mother who was moving to Colorado from Wisconsin. They also explained that the home should probably have a solar electrical source because it needed to be energy independent.

It turned out that those 2 acres were available and Mary let Janice know. Janice asked for the lawyer's number and then they talked about the home. The contractor had mailed her several plans, she said, and she liked number 3. Mary said that she'd seen the plans and that number 3 was the closest to their Wisconsin cabin. Janice told her that the home was sold and that she'd be moving when it closed in about 6 weeks. Did Mary think that was time enough to get the land bought and the cabin built? Mary told her mother that she had no idea, but Janice had better stop talking to her and get talking to the lawyer and the building contractor.

Apparently everything worked out well because a week later the contractor showed up and started to dig the basement for the cabin. This was in late June of 2010. The log cabin went up in no time at all and the contractor had electricians install batteries and inverters in the basement and solar panels on the roof. He got done the same week that Janice showed up and the moving van followed a day later. The timing was perfect and Janice got to attend the twins' 7<sup>th</sup> birthday party. There is nothing like a semi-wealthy grandmother to really spoil kids.

After the furniture was unloaded and set in place, Mary took Jack's pickup and she and her mother went grocery shopping. Some of Paul's survivalist tendencies must have rubbed off on Janice considering the food she bought. When they got back to the cabins, Janice had Mary and Jack put some of the food in her house, but most of it in the shelter. She announced, when they were done, that she wanted to get rid of her car and get herself a proper vehicle for Colorado. Neither Jack nor Mary had any idea what she had in mind, but she said that tomorrow she was going to drive into Meeker and handle that chore. Maybe this was just a phase Janice was going through, but the next day she stopped by for breakfast before leaving for town. She was properly attired in denims and

a western cut shirt. Pretty spiffy straw hat she had on, too. Jack looked at his tired old straw hat with the layers of grease. Although no one had called him 'cowboy' in a long time, he still wore that hat. He suggested to Mary that he ought to accompany Janice to make sure she didn't get ripped off and while he was at it, he thought maybe it was time to buy a new hat.

Janice didn't really need any help. She picked out a GMC Sierra 3500 with a DURAMAX diesel engine and Allison transmission. It was a 4wd crew cab model with everything but hot and cold running water and a sink. Mighty big pickup for a demure little woman, but Janice had her mind made up. The handwriting on the note she kept referring to didn't look like her handwriting, either and Jack suspected that Paul had written down what he'd get had he been there to make the purchase. It took the dealer an hour or so to get the pickup ready and Janice wanted to know where Jack had gotten his diesel fuel tank. He told her the name of the dealer and she borrowed a phone and called the guy. She wanted a 300-gallon tank on legs installed ASAP. Jack thought about it and decided to just stay out of her way, she was on a roll.

"What's with your mother?" Jack asked Mary later that evening.

"What do you mean, Jack?" Mary asked.

"She's all dressed up like a cowgirl and bought herself a diesel pickup that most men would be proud to own," Jack explained. "She seemed to be ordering the truck from a list and it might have been your father's handwriting. Then, she called the dealer and told him to put in a 300-gallon fuel tank for diesel."

"Daddy and she visited before Daddy died and as I understand it, he told her what to have for a vehicle out here in the boonies," Mary explained. "I wouldn't be too surprised if he didn't have something to do with her picking out a log cabin too. Daddy was always very protective of Mom. You haven't seen anything yet, Jack. We only brought Daddy's guns back with us. You should see what she has."

"I didn't know she even shot a gun," Jack said. "I figured her for the PTA type."

"Daddy collected guns and was into hunting, Jack," Mary chuckled, "Mom was into other things and none of it was the PTA."

"For instance?" Jack asked.

"If she shows up wearing a short-barreled Ruger Vaquero, don't challenge her to a draw," Mary chuckled. "You'll lose."

"Really?" Jack said, "I had no idea."

“Most people don’t know that about Mom and I expect that if she wants anyone to know, she’ll tell them,” Mary replied. “You just keep your mouth shut about it. You never know when it might come in handy.”

“Which brings us back to the subject of survival in an indirect way,” Jack said. “What was she thinking of adding all of that food to the shelter?”

“That was probably more of Daddy’s doing,” Mary said. “I was a little surprised myself, but I’ve learned never to argue with Mama.”

“Especially when she’s wearing a gun?” Jack joked.

“Especially,” Mary smiled.

So, Janice was a pistol packing Mama with a diesel pickup, huh? Sound like someone you’d like to meet? You probably have a better chance with Kathy Ireland. Jack had completely forgotten about buying a new straw hat, too. He sort of figured that Janice would let him drive the pickup back from town, but when he reached for the door handle, she’d slapped his hand away and told him to get in on the other side. And then, she’d fiddled with everything until she had it figured out. At her request, the dealer had installed studded snow tires. Colorado permits the use of studded snow tires year round. Personally, I would have passed, but I’m not going to be the one to tell her that she can’t have them, are you?

The twins were starting first grade this year and thanks to Janice, they didn’t want for any clothes. It had been a while since either of them had brought up either their father or mother, so apparently they were adjusting well to their new home and family. First grade was going to be quite the adventure. Jack’s outfitting business was doing well too and he had all of the customers he could handle. His only alternative was to hire more help if he wanted to run another hunting party and there weren’t any people available. You can only trade on the previous owner’s reputation so far and Jack was reestablishing himself with some of the guy’s existing customers. He was developing a good reputation for knowing the country for a non-native.

It seemed to Jack that the country was getting into trouble from what he saw on TV. This prompted him to buy a laptop computer and begin surfing the web. For the uninitiated, surfing the web can be an amazing experience. Especially if you have DSL service and Jack and Mary had a dish. He started creating bookmarks in Internet Explorer and pretty soon he had a lot of them collected. Mary saw the mess on the computer and organized them for him into categories and sub-categories and sub-sub-categories. Once she explained it to him, he got around a whole lot easier. Jack noticed that their seemed to be two schools of thought in the country, patriots and liberals. And about the only thing that they had in common was the title American.

As an employer, Jack had to provide health insurance to his employees, or thought that he did anyway. He’d taken over the policy the previous owner had that paid 70% of



covered expenses. Lately it seemed that the premiums were getting to be so high that he was going to have to consider cutting from 70/30 coverage to 60/40 coverage. After Bush's second 4-year term, the Democrats had taken Washington by storm. Jack tried to ignore politics, but it was getting increasingly harder. You'd probably think that a history major was a Democrat, but Jack was also a small businessman. Rio Blanco County, Meeker was the county seat, was decidedly Republican and Jack fit in just fine.

Being a student of history, Jack knew that a Democracy was a fragile thing. The average life of a Democracy throughout history was only about 200 years. It appeared to him that America, which was 235 years old, was living on borrowed time. The signs of decay were everywhere you looked on the Internet. One of these days, the great experiment in Democracy on this continent was going to fall flat on its face. To borrow a line from another story, these nations (Democracies) have progressed through the following sequence: from bondage to spiritual faith, from spiritual faith to great courage, from great courage to liberty, from liberty to abundance, from abundance to selfishness, from selfishness to complacency, from complacency to apathy, from apathy to dependency, from dependency back to bondage. Ah, but we were a Republic ergo, a Constitutional Democracy.

After the hunting season ended, Jack and Mary went hunting themselves. This year, they had all the appropriate licenses and they took down two deer. The venison, when added to the other meats, meant that they could get through the winter of 2010-2011 without a single trip to town. And, if the school bus couldn't get to their place to pick up the kids, nobody was going anywhere. And Grandma was only a ¼ mile away if they needed someone to watch the kids. It was good that Grandma was only ¼ mile away, but for an entirely different reason.

The United States had failed to maintain its infrastructure. Despite problems for years with supplying electricity and other vital things like pure water, healthcare and something as simple as flu vaccines, no one in power was paying sufficient attention. All of that was about to change because there was an undercurrent in the country and a lot of people were very, very angry. You could sense it if you went on the Internet and read between the lines. The Democrats had been predictable and no sooner had they gotten back in office than they had wiped out 8 years of tax cuts that the Bush administration had provided. But, America had grown tired of the Republicans and a Democrat sweep was virtually assured in 2008. Two years into that new administration and new Congress, America was busting at the seams and nobody saw it.

You know what some of the issues were, right? Gun control for one; and, taking from the rich and middle class and giving to the poor for another. Illegal immigration was at all-time highs as people came to America to get their slice of the pie. Just how many slices did they think you could get out of a single pie?

## The Loner – Chapter 6 – Disturbances

The American population had started talking about running Hillary Rodham Clinton for President even before John Kerry had conceded in 2004. That's all it ended up being was talk. Anybody remember John Dean? He was the Democrat frontrunner for the 2004 election until someone actually got a chance to vote in the primaries. Even Bill O'Reilly thought that Kerry lost the election because nobody really knew who he was. Anyway, everybody knew who Hillary was and the nation had spoken loudly about morality in 2004. Pundits had raised a lot of questions about Hillary's morality in the fall of 2007 and questioned whether or not she knew about Monica and just didn't care. There was Charles Schumer vying for the nomination too, but he was too liberal even for the Democrats.

So, the Democrats selected a moderate who promised change to appeal to the moral majority and they had succeeded. Once they got in, however, things started to go to Hell in a hand basket. By 2011 a whole lot of people had had enough. It was a case of robbing the poor to give to the poorer, making the poorer the middle class and the poor the poorer. And the rich were so rich that it was hard for even the Democrats to redistribute their wealth. The trouble started out in California. It was some homeowner protecting his home from looters after an earthquake.

Anyway the homeowner shot the looter with his totally legal 12-gauge shotgun. California has the retreat rule and you aren't allowed to shoot the burglar until he shoots you or something like that. So, when this looter guy picked up the guy's wife's jewel box, he shot him. Bam, the looter was dead with a chest full of birdshot. The cops arrested him and said he was supposed to retreat. "Retreat where?" the guy asked, "My home was gone and I was just protecting what was left of my property." Anyway, they arrested him and tried him for murder. Now the jury listened to this and listened to that and decided the guy was justified in shooting the looter and in one of those jury nullification things let the guy go.

Remember Rodney King and what a stink it made when the cops were acquitted? Same thing happened here because the dead guy was black and the shooter was white. Only this time, the reaction was one hell of a lot more violent and they didn't burn down their own neighborhoods or loot their own stores. They being the black gang members from south central. Hell, no, they had this wonderful invention called an automobile and they went to the San Fernando Valley and looted and burned down buildings there for a change. LA has the lowest number of police officers per capita of any major city in the nation. The cops in LA have a reputation for being very nasty people because they're out numbered and sometimes have to be nasty. Nasty or not, the cops were overwhelmed and the Governor called out the National Guard and tried to restore order to LA.

Now, the people in the San Fernando Valley didn't sit on their butts waiting for the National Guard. Nope, they got into their closets and under their beds and who knows where and fought back. By the time that the National Guard showed up, everyone was

shooting everyone and the Guard wasn't sure where to start arresting people. And, when they finally decided whom to arrest, they got shot at and wounded or killed. And the trouble began to spread as other inter cities erupted in protest to the killings in Los Angeles.

Am I dreaming here? If so, I sure wish I'd wake up because this is a sorry state of affairs. When the rioting broke out in other cities and the Governors of those other states called out their National Guards and they had the same problems as the California National Guard, the President decided that he had to get involved and he declared a National Emergency. If you think of how well the bad guys were armed in 2004, you can imagine how well they were armed in 2011. And, a whole lot of Americans weren't about to let the Democrats take away their right to keep and bear arms and there was a pretty brisk trade in illegal firearms by 2011.

By 2011, there were an estimated 250 million firearms in the US, nearly one for every one old enough to pick up a firearm. Since people like Jack and Mary and Janice had more than they're 'fair share' undoubtedly many people were without firearms, but these things have a way of averaging out. You can figure that everyone who was willing to use a firearm had one, or more. They weren't all assault rifles or machine guns or sawed off shotguns, but an 870 with a 26" barrel and loaded with birdshot can kill you just as dead as a sawed of shotgun loaded with tactical buck. And, unrest has a way of spreading, doesn't it?

Is there any wonder that America was the state it was in? Those hurricanes in 2004 had 'devastated' Lake Okeechobee in Florida and environmentalists bemoaned the fact. Say, doesn't God send hurricanes? You're bitching to the wrong guy if you expect me to get upset. Talk to God about it. And, the Arctic icecap was melting almost twice as fast as the rest of the planet due to a buildup of heat-trapping gases and the trend was set to continue. Oh, that's right, it was the Republicans fault, all of it, global warming, the hurricanes and the failure to reenact the AWB. Hell, they weren't in power anymore, so blame them. Hey Mr. Democrat President, George Bush didn't raise taxes, but Kerry wanted to. The Republicans didn't renew the AWB, you did and it didn't do one danged bit of good. It didn't keep those gangsters from getting automatic weapons, now did it?

Maybe what you should have done was to encourage firearms ownership. Some cities even tried that at one time and it lowered their crime rate. Nah, you couldn't do that, now could you? The liberals didn't like firearms because guns killed people. Never mind a gun never pulled its own trigger, except maybe if you dropped it, it was the gun that killed people, not the shooter.

"What are you so upset about?" Mary asked.

"Did you see the news and the problems that we're having around the country?" Jack asked.

“Yes, I saw it dear, but what did you expect?” Mary asked. “Daddy was right, this country is about to come apart at the seams.”

“I don’t know what I expected, Mary, but certainly not this,” Jack replied.

“Why not? You’re the history student and hasn’t the country been following the pattern that you described to me?” Mary asked.

“I suppose so hon, it just surprises me that’s all,” Jack admitted.

“Well, if anyone were to ask me, I’d say that major portions of this country have gotten to the dependency stage and that’s just one step from being back to bondage,” Mary argued.

“I was never in the Army, you know,” Jack said. “I don’t know if I could kill another human being.”

“If someone attacked me, would you kill them to protect me?” Mary asked.

“Of course,” Jack replied.

“The same go for the kids?” Mary continued.

“Yes,” Jack answered.

“What about my mother?” Mary pressed.

“Yes, of course, dear,” Jack replied. “But you only mentioned family.”

“What’s the difference, Jack?” Mary asked. “If you’d be willing to kill someone to protect members of your family, it means that you’d be willing to kill. I said kill, not murder. The Bible really says Thou shall not murder, you know.”

“I’d probably end up puking my guts out,” Jack admitted.

“Well, I probably would too,” Mary agreed. “But, that doesn’t mean that if it became necessary that I wouldn’t pull the trigger. If it didn’t bother you, then I’d be worried.”

“What about your mother?” Jack asked.

“Well, she’d have them shot and her gun back in her holster before she’d even realized what she did if she were protecting family,” Mary chuckled. “Then, she’d probably toss her cookies but good. There’s an old saying that goes something like ‘he who hesitates is lost’.”

“I hope it doesn’t come to that stage,” Jack prayed out loud.

"I do too, Jack," Mary nodded. "I do too."

The unrest was something like a plague creeping across the country. The nearest major city was Denver and the population of Denver was about 65% white. And while Denver might not generate trouble on its own, that didn't mean that trouble wouldn't come looking for Denver. This wasn't really a racial thing anyway. It was perhaps about expectations and the lack of hope. What was the US on, the 6th, 7th or 8th generation of welfare families? Welfare takes away your pride after a generation or two and many of those 7th and 8th generation welfare recipients had lost all semblance of hope by 2011. And, if you have no hope, you have nothing left at all.

They checked their supplies and decided that they were fine. The shelter was well stocked and they had more ammunition than they could ever hope to shoot. Still, Jack looked for chinks in their armor and decided that they had a couple. For instance, if they were forced into the shelter, all someone would have to do was cut the wires on the solar panels and they'd lose their electricity. That was easily remedied because he had a diesel generator. But, he couldn't run the generator inside the shelter because of the exhaust. So, he added intake and exhaust pipes and made certain that they were well camouflaged. Then, he addressed the problem of fuel for the generator and discovered that at full load the DGBB burned from 1.2 to 2.7gph. Jack had selected that particular generator because it was a whole house generator. The exposed fuel tank could be a problem, so he went ahead and had a 2,000-gallon tank buried and filled. That would give him 31-days continuous run time at full load and 69-days at 25% power.

The truth is that you will always miss something in your preparations. They had food, electricity, firearms and water from the spring. The spring was exposed and could present another problem, Jack decided. Someone could discover the spring and if they saw the pipes, could poison the water. Janice learned of Jack's concern, probably from Mary. The next thing you knew, old Mrs. Moneybags had a large water tank installed and plumbed to the shelter. Janice wasn't particularly happy with the icehouse either and she called Meeker and told one of the stores to bring out 2 large freezers. The solar panels would handle the loads, thankfully. Janice hadn't even given that a thought because her home's solar panels generated a lot more electricity than Jack and Mary's cabin.

Sometimes you just get lucky. That storm shelter was about 24' square with an 8' ceiling. It wasn't buried deep, there was only about 5' of earth over top, but with careful arranging they managed to fit in all of the shelving, the gun safes, the generator, the freezers and the furniture. Janice even had an extra TV and she had Jack move it to the shelter. Jack ran his own phone line and even had an Internet connection for his laptop. The only thing that he was missing that you'd find in the typical shelter was radio communications. Unless you call that CB radio they got from Jackson Office Products in Meeker radio communications. It had 120 (AM and SSB) channels and the weather channels and you didn't need a license. Jack bought an outside antenna but didn't connect it. For quick communications, he had a Wilson 5000.

What had he missed; surely he'd missed something. He had a well-stocked first aid kit and antibiotics. The bottles of Amoxicillin for the kids hadn't been hydrated by the drug store and he had several different antibiotics for the adults. He also had a list from the doctor of what antibiotics to use to treat what conditions. They made sure that all of their immunizations were up to date. None of them took prescriptions nor wore glasses. He even had an emergency dental kit in case someone had a tooth go bad. Getting back to the doctor, the guy understood what Jack was trying to accomplish. He set him up with some normal saline in 500ml bags, some IV administration sets and taught both Mary and Jack how to start an IV. In the unlikely event of a gunshot wound, he said, they would need to replace fluids. He added some bags of D5W, ringers and lactated ringer's together with instructions for their use. He told both of them to tread lightly using IV solutions. They didn't have enough, he told them for any long-term situations.

Try as he might, he couldn't think of what he'd possibly have missed. Janice gave the place the once over and said it looked good to her. Jack figured that if he'd forgotten anything, they'd probably end up knowing right away. The best that he could hope for was they wouldn't have any trouble. But if trouble came their way, they would do they're very best to protect the family; which led to another consideration. What if someone showed up needing help? They would probably end up doing what they could, that was in their nature. However, Jack didn't believe that God would automatically provide for all of their needs. Doesn't it say somewhere that God helps them who help themselves? Yes it does, but that isn't in the Bible.

They finished up just in time for the first snowstorm of 2011. Winter came a little later than normal that year. But when it came, it came on strong. There had been several bad winters since Jack had moved into the cabin, was this a sign of something bad to come? I suppose if one looks hard enough, one can find a potential disaster lurking in every corner. The upside on the snowstorm was that it helped settle the unrest slightly, in the northern states. The kids were out of school, but they wanted to stay with Grandma, giving Jack and Mary some quality time together. They found time to scoop a path in the snow to the shelter and do a complete inventory; you couldn't spend all of your time in bed.

By the time they were finished, Jack and Mary realized that between what they'd done and what Janice had added, they could spend as long as 6 months in that cramped little shelter. It would depend on whether they had to depend solely on their supplies or could depend on the solar generated electricity and water from the spring. Were they prepared for any eventuality? Boy, I guess. And given Paul's love of firearms, they could fight a couple of world wars. Speaking of which, they had taken those Super Match M1A's to a range and had sighted them in very carefully. With the 20 power scopes and match grade ammunition, the rifles were capable of shooting far more accurately than either of them could manage.

## The Loner – Chapter 7 – More Trouble

Winter may have slowed the problems in the northern tier of states, but it didn't do anything for places like Florida. Florida's population seemed, to many, to be made up of retirees, Latinos and tourists. Persons 65 and older made up over 20% of the population by 2012. Latinos accounted for another 20% of the population and there were as many Cubans in Florida as there were in Cuba, or so it seemed. And blacks accounted for about 20% of the population, give or take. There was some overlap between the different demographics because some of the ethnic groups included some of the seniors. As for race relations in Florida, there hadn't been any major racial unrest in Florida since the Miami riots when the Cuban boat people started to enter into the Floridian population during the Carter administration. Did I mention that we were now in a new year?

It was mid-January and the snow was butt deep on a 9' Indian. The roads were clear and the school busses running so Robbie and Lane were in school. Janice had come by for coffee and to visit with Mary. Jack had dug out his snowshoes and went to look at the timber situation. He wasn't expecting any trouble, all the bears should be sleeping, but he took his model 70, just in case. He told Mary that he'd only be gone an hour or so and to have coffee on when he got back. Mary and Janice got involved in a conversation and Mary wasn't paying attention to the clock. The next thing she knew the kids were coming in the door.

Mary looked at the clock and realized that Jack had been gone for 2½ hours. That wasn't like Jack; he was usually back when he said he'd be there. A hundred different thoughts probably went through Mary's mind and she decided that she'd better go look for him. Janice said that she'd take the kids to her house and stand by channel 9 on her CB. Mary dug out a 40-channel portable, got her skis, a first aid kit and her Super Match. Odd choice for a rifle, just to go looking for your husband, but there you go. It was easy enough to follow Jack's snowshoe trail and it wasn't long before Mary came upon Jack. He heard her coming and motioned for her to be quiet and to keep low.

Jack had happened on an encampment of men and had been watching them. When he saw that Mary had the Super Match, he offered to trade her rifles. She traded and then slid off her pack, which contained a half dozen extra magazines, all with BTHP. Jack whispered for her to go back to the house and call the Sheriff and the Park Rangers. Mary was reluctant to leave but she took off immediately. When she got back to the house, she called Janice and filled her in. Janice said that she was going to bring the kids to the shelter and warm the place up in case they needed to hide out for a while.

Mary called the Sheriff's office in Meeker and asked the Sheriff to call the Park Rangers. She'd seen enough to know that this wasn't some Boy Scout camping affair and that the men were pretty well armed. Then, she got a backpack and added more M1A magazines. She put on her ALICE gear with its AR magazines and added extra AR magazines and a thermos of coffee. Jack hadn't taken a pistol, so she grabbed his M1911 and 4 extra magazines for it as well. Then, she got back on those skis, grabbed his Super Match and headed back to cover Jack's back.

The Sheriff rolled out all the Deputies he could spare and called the State Patrol and the Rangers. They'd received word that a bunch of troublemakers had gone missing and there was an APB out on them. Between Jack's snowshoe tracks and 3 sets of ski tracks, the Deputies didn't have any trouble following where Jack and Mary had gone. And, nobody was much worried about issues like jurisdiction because this was supposedly a dangerous bunch of men.

Mary caught up with Jack and gave him the thermos of coffee, his .45 and magazines and the extra magazines for the M1A. They also swapped rifles. Jack wasn't frozen or anything but that hot cup of coffee was well received. Within 30 minutes, several Deputies came on the scene and they took cover. Through the entire affair, Junior had laid there with his flesh pulled back exposing his fangs and growling that low, mean growl. Jack went with the Chief Deputy and the Sheriff and explained what had attracted his attention and what he'd seen during the over 2 hours he'd been watching the men. They were heavily armed, Jack said, and they had women with them who were being treated badly. The Deputies suggested that Jack and Mary return home. There were too many men for the Deputies to handle alone and backup in the form of Park Rangers and State Patrol was on the way.

Jack was more than willing to stay and help the Deputies, but they'd made it clear that they were to leave. So, Mary and he headed back to the cabin. The three of them got back to the cabin and immediately went to the shelter after Jack retrieved their other guns from the cabin. By this time, Janice had the place warm and she and the kids were watching TV. There was a fresh pot of coffee on and Jack and Mary sat down at the table to have coffee and warm up. Janice handed Jack a Uniden Handheld Digital Police Scanner tuned to the local LEO frequencies. She pointed to a box on the floor that held a base station model of the same scanner. Apparently she'd been holding out on them... and blowing her money again.

It was difficult for them to follow what was happening out in the forest because the Sheriff's Department and State Patrol were maintaining tight radio discipline. But from what they could tell, more State Patrol units were being called in together with a detachment from Ft. Carson that was on standby. According to the scanner, the Army was coming in by Blackhawk's and should be there before too long.

"Anybody home?" a voice called out. It was a member of the State patrol checking to make sure they were all right.

"We're fine," Jack said. "Care for a cup of coffee?"

"Boy would I ever," the officer said. "Say, this is quite the setup. Are you a survivalist or something?"

"More like the or something," Jack said. "It started out as a storm shelter and we just kept adding on."



“From what I can see,” the officer said, “This is about the best stocked shelter in this part of the country.”

“You’ve seen other shelters?” Jack asked, a little surprised.

“Here and there, you know,” the officer said. “The state the country is in more than a few people have built shelters. Two gun safes?”

“Mary’s father died a while back and she inherited his gun collection,” Jack remarked.

“Anything special in that collection?” the officer asked.

“Hunting rifles and shotguns. Some M1A’s (they were still legal). The usual collector’s stuff,” Jack replied. What the officer didn’t know wouldn’t hurt them.

The State Patrol officer noticed the cases of 5.56 ammo but didn’t say anything. Maybe they had some bolt action 5.56s (still legal) or maybe they had some AR’s (now illegal, except for LEO’s). Either way, a man had the right to protect his home and he was much more interested in getting the bad guys out in the forest, at least at the moment. Not every law enforcement officer in the US exactly supported the new AWB. They would enforce it, if pressed to do so, either by someone’s conduct or a higher authority, but not all of them saw anything wrong with a HBAR AR15. And, this was rural Colorado, not downtown LA.

All the while the officer had been there, Janice and Mary were brewing coffee in the coffemaker and they had managed to put several pots worth in 2 1-gallon thermos jugs. They sent the coffee and a package of foam cups and assorted sweeteners and creamers with the officer when he finally left. They hoped that he remembered the coffee and forgot anything else he might have seen in the shelter. He must have, that was the last they heard of anything until a Deputy Sheriff eventually dropped of the empty jugs.

The Army bought in a Platoon worth of men from the 10th Special Forces Group (Airborne). Between the Army, the State Patrol, the Sheriff’s Department and the Park Rangers, the bad guys were seriously out numbered. It had become obvious that the bad guys had some unwilling female companions and that set the tone for the events that followed. Fortunately for the good guys, the bad guys had no sense of noise discipline and they didn’t hear the SF troops and LEO’s moving into position. The SF people slowly eliminated the few guards who were posted and the entourage rushed the camp. There was barely even a firefight, so swift was the attack.

Back in the shelter, Jack and Mary knew the Army had arrived because of a radio call, but beyond that, there was no further radio traffic. Eventually, they ate dinner and put the kids to bed and the three adults sat at the table talking in soft tones. Janice had indeed been holding out on them. Paul had suggested that she get a Ham license and she’d gotten the materials and memorized the answers to all of the questions. She’d

even learned the answers all the way up to extra class and had that license. When this was over, she told them, they were going to Denver or getting on the Internet and ordering a Ham radio or three. There was an antenna for the base station scanner, she said, a Diamond D-130J.

“Being in the shelter just these few hours has made me realize just how cut off from the outside world we are,” Janice said. “There is no reason for that. I have a Ham license and it isn’t any problem spending money on equipment. I received a catalog from Amateur Electronics Supply and I know that there’s a HRO in Denver. One way or the other, we’re going to put in a complete communications shack.”

“Will there be room for all of the equipment?” Jack asked.

“We can put everything on that desk in the corner, Jack,” Janice said. “And, if we need to, we can add more solar panels to your roof.”

“I hate to see you spending money like this,” Jack said.

“Jack, get real,” Janice retorted. “I’m an old woman who doesn’t go anywhere. I could live on half of Paul’s pension and I just end up saving the income from that 401k. Besides, Paul had a lot of life insurance and in case you haven’t noticed, I’ve paid cash for everything.”

“How are you going to know what equipment to buy, Mom?” Mary asked.

“That’s easy honey,” Janice laughed, “I’ll just call them up and ask what is the best, if price is no object. I’m sure we can find a Ham there in Meeker who will help me get the stuff set up, if for no other reason than he’ll get to try out all of the equipment.”

“Hello,” a voice called out.

“Who’s there?” Jack replied.

“Sheriff’s Department. I have your coffee jugs,” a Deputy answered.

“Come on down Deputy,” Jack hollered.

“Appreciate the coffee folks,” the Deputy said. “We got ‘em. They had a bunch of women prisoners with them and the women are ok. Can’t say the same for the rest of those people though. The fella you gave the coffee to noticed your 5.56 ammo. He said to tell you to shift the stuff around so only the 7.62 is obvious. Well, I’ve got to get going. You folks can return to your homes now.”

“Let’s just sleep here tonight, Jack,” Mary suggested. “I don’t want to wake the kids up and drag them out in the cold and then try to get them back to sleep.”

“Why don’t you go ahead and call AES tomorrow, Janice,” Jack suggested, “I’ll make room for that Ham gear.”

There is one point of interest that I might mention. When they put in the stool, Jack threw up a wall and covered it with drywall. The wall was insulated to deaden the sound and there was an exhaust fan that fed the air through a HEPA filter. Now Jack hadn’t been planning on Janice at the time, but there was sufficient privacy in the shelter that at least you could use the toilet in private and the odors were contained. The shelter had 6 bunk beds along one wall so there were ample sleeping accommodations. They started out with Mary’s furniture, but it took too much space. Then, Jack had put in 4 bunks and later another pair. There wasn’t much room in the shelter for any more than 6 people anyway.

After they got up, Janice went home and got on the phone to the AES store in Las Vegas. The man on the phone was most helpful once she gave him her call sign and explained what she wanted. She did one stop shopping and the guy told her that it would be coming UPS, prepaid. They would need a day or so to put that large of an order together, however. She included a spool of RG-213/U coaxial cable and connectors in her order.

Before Jack went back to the cabin, he rearranged the ammunition. Obviously, he was getting a pass this time and he didn’t intend to draw any more attention to what they might have for guns. It was bad enough that a member of the State Patrol and a Deputy knew that they had 5.56 ammunition.

This whole incident had been really unnerving. Those people had been less than an hour walk from the house, and more like about ½ hour walk. If he hadn’t gone out to check on the timber to see what he might cut for the coming year, they could have been overrun. That was something to think about! From now on, he decided, they would go armed everywhere they went. They’d go to Meeker and talk to the Sheriff about concealed carry permits.

Water usually doesn’t run uphill. Since the sink and toilet drained, obviously Jack either had installed the septic system lower than the shelter or had installed a sewage pump. And, since they had the kids since before their 5th birthdays, Mary at least, knew that they needed to be entertained. I seem to recall that Janice had raised a child too. And the accountant in Meeker took care of the books and taxes.

## The Loner – Chapter 8 – Armed to the Teeth and More

Colorado law essentially provides that a Sheriff shall issue a permit to carry a concealed handgun to an applicant who is a legal resident of the state; is at least twenty-one; is not ineligible to possess a firearm, has not been convicted of perjury in relation to an application for a concealed weapon permit; does not chronically and habitually abuse alcohol; is not an unlawful user of or addicted to a controlled substance as provided in federal law and regulations; is not subject to a restraining order in effect at the time the application is submitted, or a permanent restraining order, or a temporary restraining order in effect at the time the application is submitted; and demonstrates competency with a firearm. Janice, Mary and Jack received their concealed weapons permits.

Mary and Janice bought those specially constructed purses to carry their Browning Hi-Powers. Jack opted to go with a .45 ACP Colt Commander from Paul's collection. Jack especially liked the Colt because Paul had a gunsmith give it a good going over. It was lighter than an M1911 and very accurate. Jack went with an inside the waistband holster and a dual magazine case. To round out their equipment, Jack put together fanny packs that contained a good quality, but reasonably priced folding knife, and various survival supplies. Janice added Garmin personal GPS's to the fanny packs. They added some water packs and a lifeboat ration and a very compact first aid kit. The fanny packs were only intended to allow them to get home on foot and weren't necessarily 72-hour bugout bags.

Seriously, the 3 adults had no intention of bugging out anywhere. They had a perfectly well equipped shelter to use that could support them for up to 6-months. Jack did an inventory of the power requirements and decided that he should have gone with a slightly larger fuel tank. So, he bought the same model of generator for Janice. In the early spring, when the ground was sufficiently thawed, he added 5,000 gallon tanks to both homes and connected his two together. The new generator was moved into her basement and her 5,000-gallon diesel tank installed. The three tanks were connected together and each had a fuel pump. They now had 185 days runtime at full load and for one generator and  $416\frac{2}{3}$  days at  $\frac{1}{2}$  load. Janice had an additional row of solar panels installed on Jack and Mary's roof and Jack laid in a good supply of PRI-D.

As they began to consider other things to add to the shelter, Jack realized that they simply didn't have space for anything else. He decided to add a 12' by 24' addition to the north wall of the shelter. It would be a simple matter moving the generator and mounting the electrical panel on the other side of the wall in the new addition. They could move the gun safes and ammo to the addition too, freeing up a little more space in the 24' square shelter. Part of the reason for his decision was that they had no room to store spare parts, e.g. filters for the generator, an oversight on his part. Another reason was to get that ammo and the gun safes out of sight. There was also the added advantage of creating a 12' square bedroom for Mary and him. Moving the ammo would also clear up shelf space and they would have more room for food.

Janice had her own computer and had been busy surfing the web. She ran across the website for Utah Shelter Systems and was impressed with their air filtration systems and blast doors, especially the air filtration systems. If the shelter were used as a hide-away from a forest fire, she reasoned, it might not be a bad idea to have an air filtration system. The Swiss built LUWA system was a combination chemical and biological filter, air pump and blast valve. She called them up and ordered one, simple as that. It must be nice to have more money than you need.

By the time the modifications to the shelter were complete, it could no longer be classified as a storm shelter. And, the only thing it needed to have to qualify as a bomb shelter was an armored blast door. Jack jokingly mentioned this within Janice's earshot and the next thing you knew two construction workers were installing a blast door. Jack decided that if he had any more bright ideas, he'd just keep them to himself. Thus the early summer of 2012 was filled with little projects. Janice tracked down a Ham operator and he helped her set up the radio system.

One day during late summer, Janice and Mary were visiting and Mary happened to comment that if they had more food, they could last in the shelter for up to a year. Mary soon learned the same lesson that Jack had learned to keep her mouth shut around her mother. You guessed it, a UPS truck showed up from Idaho with enough food to fill the shelves and the remaining empty space in the new addition. Mary's principal concern was that if they ended up getting stuck in that shelter for a full year, it wouldn't matter how much of anything they had, they all be dead from cabin fever.

Around the US, in isolated areas, even the Army was having difficulty restoring order. It was a little reminiscent of the fighting in Vietnam, but in this case the tactics were more hit and run and involved a lot of sniping. If you really thought about it, I suppose that you could conclude that the tactics being used were more reminiscent of the American Revolutionary War. But, nobody was calling this a Revolution. Nobody that is, unless you were an insider in some of the groups of American Patriots who were involved because they had just plain had enough. The media and the government called it an insurrection.

After the blast door was installed, Jack had installed a lock on the inside only. And while he was in the shelter doing that Junior was with him. Suddenly Junior began to wag his tail and to look at the door. Jack realized that while Junior was a good alarm system, he had no idea who was on the other side of the door. It turned out to be Robbie and that was ok. But what, he wondered, if one of those two LEO's had turned out to be a bad guy? He went surfing and found a solution to his problem at a place called spycameras dot net and talked to Janice about it. Now Janice wasn't about to let a little thing like money stop her and she ordered 12 cameras and 3 of the quad monitors. I guess it was a good thing that Jack had built the addition, huh?

They hired a fella from Glenwood Springs to come up and install the security setup. There were 4 cameras pointing out and 4 pointing in plus 2 in the stairwell and 2 covering the door for the shelter. Jack took another look at the large trap door to the shelter

stairway and replaced the wooden door with a steel door. The door was a dead give-away that there was a shelter, but he didn't think it made any difference. He picked up an intercom at Jackson Office Products in Meeker. Somebody could bust through that steel door, but they couldn't get through the blast door at the bottom of the stairs without dynamite and a lot of it. Let's face it, there are limits and there is no such thing as perfect security. The best you could hope for was to discourage the other guy and force him to go looking for easier pickings.

Inside the shelter, the quad monitors were mounted over the desk. That desk had become the heart of the shelter in many ways. One person could sit at the desk and monitor communications and security at the same time. Visitors to the shelter were spared views of the gun safes and ammunition and the shelter was marginally quieter because of generator being in the new addition. The door at the top of the stairs had the conventional lockset plus a heavy deadbolt.

Jack got out with his chainsaw after and began to lay in his supply of wood for the winter. He had to cut the wood to length and load it in his pickup, haul it home and stack it. He'd picked up a used hydraulic log splitter a year or so back, so splitting the logs for the Franklin stove was a whole lot easier. It still took a lot of pickup loads of wood to lay in an adequate supply of firewood. You have to admit one thing, there sure wasn't any deadfall left near their home. Jack had a firewood permit from the USDA Forest Service.

With the onset of warm weather, the situation in the US had gone from bad to worse. The more the government tried to put down the insurrection, the worse it got. It appeared that even law abiding citizens weren't so law abiding when it came to that new AWB. The US had gone through isolated incidents before over firearms issues, like at Waco and Ruby Ridge. They'd essentially wiped out the Branch Davidians and had killed Randy Weaver's wife and son. Randy's crime was sawing off a couple of shotguns and selling them to an undercover fed. That seemed to be worth bringing in several truckloads of LEO's and shooting his wife and son. Sawing off a shotgun was such a *serious* offense after all.

There were probably hundreds of other examples of federal heavy handedness, but those 2 events make the point. Of course, if you were to check with someplace like the ATF website, you'd be told what great LEO's they were and how they were keeping America safe from criminals and would-be terrorists. I'm not advocating any particular cause here, but you know how bad things are these days. I even saw a piece on CNN about how dangerous BB guns are and how many deaths they cause. Must have missed that piece they did on kitchen knives and how many people they killed every year.

Of the 25 species of snakes in Colorado, the western prairie rattlesnake (*Crotalus viridis*) and the massasauga (*Sistrurus catenatus*) are the only venomous species. The western rattlesnake appears in most habitats throughout the state. The massasauga, however, is limited to the southeastern grasslands. Widow spiders, particularly the western widow (*Latrodectus hesperus*) are common in Colorado. They usually nest near

the ground at dark, undisturbed sites. Window wells, entrances to crawl spaces, old rodent burrows, corners of garages, and abandoned rodent burrows are some of their favorite nesting sites. Bites from the widow spider are painful and potentially dangerous because they contain a nerve poison. Fortunately, widow spiders are non-aggressive and rarely bite. When bites do occur they happen when the female is provoked, for example, when an unwitting person presses down on a spider that is resting beneath a log or rock.

The kids didn't have 2 parents; they had 3 plus a Grandma. Who was that 3rd parent? Why Junior, of course. Although Junior was Jack's dog, he could more appropriately be called the family's dog. In the summer, Junior was with those kids anytime they ventured outside. And, though it might seem out of place, the elevation at the Meeker airport was 6,421 feet and the zip code was 81641. Typically one could expect 16" of snow in Meeker, according to the NWS for area 05-02 (western Colorado). The elevation of White River National Forest ranges from 5,000 to 14,000 feet. Most of the campgrounds are between 5,400 and 10,000 feet.

Persons coming from lower elevations should be aware that time is needed to adjust to the higher elevations. Warm days and cool nights can be expected in the mountains during the summer. July and August are usually the warmest months, and afternoon thunderstorms are common. Be prepared for both warm and chilly weather, as well as for rain showers. Fall is brief but spectacular, as changing aspens cloak the mountains in gold and red. Peak color normally occurs during the last part of September. Crisp, sunny days mingle with early snowstorms in what many consider the premier season of the year.

Most of the dangerous snakes in that part of the country were of the two-legged variety. We met some of them earlier. If there were any of the legless varieties, Junior had no doubt frightened them away. He was mighty protective of the children. Opportunities abound to observe, photograph, and hunt a wide variety of species. Wildlife within the forest includes elk, mule deer, black bear, bighorn sheep, mountain goat and mountain lion. There are approximately 20,000 elk, one of the largest herds in North America. Numerous streams and lakes provide excellent fishing. The more common species found include rainbow trout, brook trout, lake trout, and mountain whitefish. The headwaters to the Aspen section of the Roaring Fork River is particularly popular among fly fishermen.

It appears that the greatest danger lay in running across a black bear or a mountain lion. Generally, mountain lions try to avoid people and black bears frequent places where they can get a handout, like in and around campgrounds. Wait a minute, what about wolves? Forget it, if you find one, you can kill it, but you probably won't see one. I just want you to get a feel for Rio Blanco County, Colorado. Meeker isn't that big of a town anyway; the population is probably under 4,000. And Buford? Ever heard of Midway, IA? Nowheresville, Unincorporated. Not putting the place down, mind you. Doesn't have many streets, though. Does have the Bufordview Lodge down the road a ways.

Let's get back to the snakes. Snakes are an interesting subject; especially the 2-legged variety. Perhaps those 2-legged snakes were nothing more than opportunists trying to take advantage of the unrest that was continuing to build in the US. Lord knows when it got hot enough outside and people could move around freely, the snakes came out from their hidey-holes and went looking for trouble, regardless of the number of legs. And, some of those snakes were looking for a new hidey-hole, away from the hustle and bustle of the crowds. They holed up in the White River National Forest somewhere in the general area of the South Fork River. And they supplied themselves by foraging expeditions.

Word of a new group in the area soon spread, but neither the Park Rangers nor the Sheriff's Departments from Rio Blanco and Garfield Counties nor the State Patrol could get a handle on where the people were hiding out. Grandma started packing that pistol, er, the short-barreled Ruger Vaquero, and Mary tried her best to keep an eye on the kids at all times. That was easier said than done, through the summer of 2012 and coming up on their 9th birthdays.

The kids were old enough to learn to shoot a rifle, in Jack and Mary's opinion. And while there were a fair number of .22's in Paul's collection, Grandma decided that they needed rifles of their own. We won't get into the debate over whether the perfect .22LR rifle is the Ruger 10/22, the Winchester 9422 or any one of a dozen other firearms. That Marlin 39A is a fine rifle and I lean towards the Winchester 9422. But, the 10/22 is very popular, too. Janice bought them 10/22's with the synthetic stocks and stainless actions and barrels. She said they were all weather guns. They got the rifles, a reasonable number of clothes and a few other things for their 9th birthdays. They also got a healthy education in the safe handling and use of firearms and the guns were kept in the locked gun cabinet in the cabin.

Arguably, 9 is a little young to own a firearm. These were tough times and what if the adults got killed? At least the kids would be able to fend for themselves until help showed up. Assuming they survived. It really was getting that bad around the country in 2012. And, Jack didn't have nearly the number of reservations for the fall hunt. It would seem that the people who would be hunters of wild game perhaps had other things to hunt, who can say? One thing was certain; Jack wasn't short of help that fall.



## The Loner – Chapter 9 – Snake River

The reference is to the South Fork River and the people who had taken up residence along its bank, not to the river up north. They were on the north side of the river and had themselves some ATV's and snowmobiles. And, they really were armed to the teeth with all kinds of military weapons they'd recovered from some troops they'd ambushed at various times. It wasn't that no one was looking for them; it was more a case of no one could find them and anybody that did, didn't live to talk about it. They were a nasty bunch of opportunistic SOB's, if you ask me.

"Mary, I wouldn't be letting those kids run around outside like that," Janice suggested.

"They're ok, Mom," Mary replied, "If you ask me, you're overreacting to this situation. Junior won't let anyone get within shouting distance of either one of the kids."

"Junior can only watch one of them at a time," Janice retorted. "I think that I'll watch Lane so Junior can keep an eye on Robbie."

"And who is going to keep an eye on you?" Mary asked.

"You think I can't handle myself?" Janice retorted.

"I didn't say that, Mom," Mary retreated. "But, what if you're so busy watching Lane that someone sneaks up on you?"

"You think that I don't know what situational awareness is?" Janice asked. "Your father didn't think I did either, but he NEVER was able to sneak up on me!"

"Ok, Mom, but you be careful," Mary cautioned.

What was going on in the rest of the country? The US population was over 300 million. The military only ever amounts to about 0.5% of the population, so we can safely assume that the peacetime military amount to about 1.5 million and there were the Reserves and the Guard, so call it 2 million. So, there were 2 million soldiers, sailors, airmen and marines trying to control the other 298 plus million? My math may be bad, but that is a ratio of almost 150 to 1. And, a whole lot of those other 298 million had some military experience, did they not? By 2012 there probably weren't many WWII vets around or Korean vets, but there were probably a whole lot from Vietnam and later. And a lot of these people were Patriots. Or, is that an unfashionable word in 2012?

And if only 25% of the population was veterans and only 25% of them opposed the government, the military was outnumbered 9 to 1 by people who had some idea what they were doing. You can add to that another 3-5% of the population who were probably 'bad guys' who opposed the 'good guys' and the military. So, you had the military and the 'good guys' fighting the 'bad guys' and each other. And then you had the majority of the population just trying to stay out of everyone's way. And some of them were people like

Jack, Mary and Janice. It doesn't take much of an imagination for you to picture what was going on in the country. Maybe as many as 10% or more of the population was actively engaged in some form of warfare.

You have to figure that the civilian militias weren't about to engage the military head on, the military had all of that fancy equipment like tanks and planes and bombs and cannons. Being a veteran didn't appear to count for much, 2004 proved that. So the moderate Democrat who made it to the White House in 2008 hadn't needed to be a veteran. Let's see, which branch of the service was Bill Clinton in? I guess I've made that point. The country, in summary, was going at it tooth and nail.

You didn't see much of that in western Colorado up in the mountains. But the economy was going to hell and Janice's 401k yields, and therefore her income was off. Jack wasn't getting a full season's worth of business, either. Janice didn't need the income, but she'd hit her saving pretty hard making sure the shelter was ready for anything and everything that came their way. On the other hand, what did it matter, they had about one of everything and a whole lot more than one of some things (like guns and ammo). And, you could always hunt if you got low on meat. So, they tightened their belts a notch of two and didn't spend money they didn't have to spend.

The kids were starting 3rd grade and had grown like weeds. Junior was 8 years old and they decided to get him a puppy to train. It wasn't hard to find a German Shepherd pup if you didn't insist on pure bloodlines. The new puppy was called Shep and after a period of adjustment, Junior would allow him in the room without growling at him.

That gang of bad guys down on 'Snake River' had hit places in the area and had ranged out as far as Rifle and Glenwood Springs. They seemed to prefer late night hit and run tactics and grabbed what they could and disappeared before Johnny Law could show up. The various law enforcement agencies had tried everything from mounted posses to helicopters but still had no idea where they were. The bad guys hadn't tried hitting private residences because apparently they figured that they wouldn't get enough to make it worth the risk. However, that was all about to change once winter set in. Winter would seriously affect their mobility and they didn't quite have enough food put up to get the group through until spring.

"What are we going to do if we get trapped in the shelter, honey?" Mary asked.

"What do you mean trapped?" Jack asked.

"We'll, say we get in the shelter because of those bad guys that are roaming around and the TV monitors show that they camp out at our house?" Mary said.

"Well, there's no way that they can get in and we have enough stuff to last a year if push came to shove, Mary," Jack replied, "I don't really see the problem. Besides, we have radio communications and could call for help."

“Just imagine for a minute that they take over the cabin and cut down all of the antennas and find that fill pipe for the diesel tank,” Mary suggested. “What would we do then?”

“I’m hearing you say that we need a way out of the place other than the blast door,” Jack acknowledged.

“Right, Jack, call it a back door,” Mary said.

“Well, I’ve got a maul to break out block and a shovel to dig a tunnel, so we wouldn’t be trapped,” Jack pointed out.

“True, but why don’t we cut out some block and dig a tunnel now below the frost line?” Mary suggested. “We could dig it part way to the surface and all we’d have to do would be to finish it if we needed to get out.”

“Any hole we cut in the block would show,” Jack protested.

“Not necessarily, Jack, we could put it behind the head of our bed in the addition and hook up some ropes to pull the bed back into place,” Mary countered.

Jack might just as well give up. He had just finished a slow hunting season, barely covering expenses. He needed something to occupy his time anyway. So, they went to the shelter the next day, moved the bed and cut out a 2’ square out of the block. The tunnel was about 13’ below ground level. Jack slowly dug a tunnel about 4×4 to a distance of 150’ from the shelter. That took him well into December. Then, he started digging straight up until he hit frozen ground. He stopped right there. He had a pile of ½” plywood and he lined the tunnel and put in supports to keep it from caving in. The final test was when he went into the tunnel and pulled the bed back in place. Mary used Janice’s Polaroid camera and took pictures from every angle. You simply couldn’t tell the tunnel was there after the bed was pulled back in place.

One night during Christmas vacation from school, Junior started to act very strangely. At first Jack dismissed it, but then he became uneasy. A dog could hear things that a man couldn’t and from a long way off. Jack called Janice and told her to grab her gun and come to the shelter. He sent Mary and the kids down below with Shep, and Junior and he kept a lookout. When Junior started to get restless and pace, Jack headed to the shelter. Janice was already there and had the radios fired up. Although it was after dark, the security cameras were extremely sensitive, even in low light and they observed a large group of snowmobiles pulling in. Jack picked up the phone to call the Sheriff, but the line was already down. He suggested that Janice try to reach a Ham operator and have them call the Sheriff for them.

Meanwhile, he got out their guns and all of their magazines and loaded them. Junior growled and Jack noticed on the monitor that the bad guys had discovered the shelter door and were doing their best to break into it. Janice had been unable to raise anyone

on the radio. She decided right then and there that if they got out of this one she was going to buy a radio on the police band and to hell with the Sheriff if he didn't like it. She kept trying until the SWR meters indicated that someone had either cut the antenna wires or knocked down the antennas. She shut down the radios because they were useless.

Jack had loaded all of the AR and M1A magazines. It didn't really take the men all that long to knock down that steel door and when they started to work on the blast door, Jack decided that it was time to bugout. They took the 2 M1A's and each got an AR. The women took their Hi-Powers and Jack that Colt Commander. Everyone was bundled up warmly against the cold and they put muzzles on the dogs. The bed came away from the wall and everyone went into the tunnel. Jack pulled the bed up tightly against the wall and secured the ropes to anchors he had set in the wall. They quietly moved to the end of Mary's tunnel and Mary kept an eye on the tunnel for any sign of light while Jack began to break through the frozen ground.

Paul's gun safes could only be opened if you had a key and knew the combination or had a cutting torch. Jack wasn't particularly worried about the guns. But, they had a lot of food and ammo in that shelter and he wasn't about to let anyone take it from them. Maybe, he thought, they could turn the tables on the bad guys and trap them in the shelter until they could get help. They still had a cell phone if they could just get above ground. The frozen ground was proving to be a challenge, but Jack kept chipping away. After about 45 minutes he finally broke through and they were out. First he called the Sheriff and told them that they were under attack by the bad guys. Then, he sent Janice with the kids and Shep into the woods and unmuzzled Junior. The three of them circled the shelter and came in the same way the bad guys had. There were more bad guys than Jack had imagined and they had pretty well gone through the house. They were gathered around the entrance to the shelter, so Jack assumed that they hadn't managed to break through the blast door just yet.

About that time they picked up the faint howling of sirens. The bad guys must have heard them too, because there were shouts and the people started to come out of the stairwell. Jack and Mary opened fire with their AR's and began to hose down the would-be thieves. Because they had the M4-FA suppressors, the bad guys were unable to locate them. They took their time and took them out one-by-one. The bad guys had quite an assortment of arms and they included some automatic weapons. They were spraying and praying but they really didn't have a target. About that time the law arrived. The Deputies must have taken all of 10 seconds to assess the situation and they brought their own AR's out of the trunks and or grabbed a shotgun and they began to unload on the bad guys. They didn't tell Jack and Mary to leave this time because they were badly outnumbered. And of course, once the Deputies began to fire, the bad guys had a target.

Jack had left the yard light on and that put the bad guys at a distinct disadvantage. There was enough light that the Deputies and Jack and Mary could see their targets but the bad guys only had a general area to aim at. Finally, one of the guys shot out the

yard light, plunging the area around the house and shelter into relative darkness; relative because they had left lights on in the house. As the firefight raged, more and more Deputies and finally members of the State Patrol arrived upon the scene. When Jack and Mary had exhausted their ammunition for the AR's they slipped off and Jack took the AR's to the entrance to the tunnel. He climbed down the ladder with both of their AR's and returned to the surface. After they had detached the suppressors, they returned and rejoined the Deputies and other LEO's. By this time, the fight was all but over and they didn't have to fire another shot.

The Deputy who had warned Jack about his 5.56 ammo took note of the M4-FA suppressors and the AR's but didn't say anything to anyone. He'd been one of the Deputies who'd shown up when Jack and Mary were watching the other bunch of bad guys and he knew dang well that they had at least one AR15. He hadn't known about the suppressors, but anymore, they were no more illegal than the rifles themselves. Either one of them could land you in the slam, if Bubba happened to see them. By the way, this guy's name was Ray, not Bubba. He did, however, mention it to his brother-in-law on the State Patrol. You remember him; he's the guy they gave the coffee to. Maybe I should take that advice I received and rename this story to 'The Family Affair'.

When the shooting was done and the remaining bad guys had been cuffed and loaded into a school bus, Jack went back to the tunnel entrance and crawled down the tunnel, moved the bed and returned the AR's to the Gun Safe. Janice had happened along with the kids and he had taken hers, too. The thing about a gun safe is that cops need a search warrant to open it and they need probable cause to get a search warrant. Even if some of the other Deputies might have thought that they'd seen some suppressed AR's, they couldn't find any now. At least not without that search warrant and, the very first requirement to get a search warrant is that you have to want to get one in the first place.

From the Sheriff's point of view, Jack had been in the area for 8 years, had married a gal from the Main Street Café, had adopted 2 kids and was a well thought of outfitter. He wasn't a drinking man and they showed up at church on a pretty regular basis. They had never been any calls to the house for domestic abuse or anything else except that previous bad guy call. Nah, Jack and Mary Summers weren't anyone you really had to worry about. And none of his Deputies had said anything about those suppressed AR's. Oh, yes, he knew they had them, he'd seen them with his own 2 eyes. But a Sheriff is an elected politician and unless someone complained, he wasn't about to stir the pot. This wasn't Los Angeles County, California; it was Rio Blanco County, Colorado with a population probably about equal to the half the size of the LA County Sheriff Department's staff. (9,000 sworn plus 700 Reserve plus 7,600+ civilians = 17,300+)

## The Loner – Chapter 10 – Some Good Advice

In 2003, the population of Rio Blanco County, Colorado was 5,938, just so you know. About 3 days after the big shootout, the Sheriff showed up.

“Jack, I’m not here to give you a bad time, but I’ve got to know something,” the Sheriff said.

“What can I tell you Sheriff?” Jack asked.

“I saw the 2 suppressed AR15’s, and I have to cover my ass on this one. How many of the AR’s do you have, and how many NFA firearms do you have?” he asked.

“Well, we have 3 suppressed AR15’s, 3 suppressors for our M1A Super Match’s and I have a Ruger .22 with an integral suppressor,” Jack admitted.

“No automatic weapons or explosive devices?” the Sheriff asked.

“No Sheriff, we don’t have any,” Jack said. “Your people picked up all the bad guys’ weapons the other night. I was busy putting the AR15’s back in my gun safe in the shelter.”

“Well, ok then,” the Sheriff said. “I assume that you’re telling the truth because you didn’t have to tell me about any of that stuff. Look, those things are LEO and military only. I think I know how we can circumvent the legal problem they represent. Stand up and raise your right hand.”

Jack rose and did as the Sheriff requested. The Sheriff swore him in as a ‘Special Deputy’. He handed Jack a badge and ID than only needed a photograph to be complete.

“You get into Meeker within the next day or two and we’ll get your picture on that ID and get a set of your prints, again,” the Sheriff said. “Now I don’t expect you to act in the capacity of a Deputy unless I specifically direct you to do so. I’m cutting some corners here, so go along with me, ok?”

“Sure Sheriff, I’d be glad to comply,” Jack replied. “I appreciate your trust in me.”

“Bring Mary and your mother-in-law,” the Sheriff said. “In for a penny, in for a pound. I might just as well swear them in too and then nobody can give any of the three of you any crap. But, like I said, I’m on thin ice here so don’t start playing Wyatt Earp or anything.”

“Sheriff, so help me God, all we want is to be left alone,” Jack assured the Sheriff.

"I figured that," he replied. "Say, your mother-in-law was on the phone to my office yesterday wanting to know about buying a police radio. I told her where to get one and also told her that if they gave her any trouble to refer them to my office. I'd suggest that you buy 3 of those handhelds like my Deputies and I use."

"I'll mention it to Janice," Jack said.

"Now, being you're going to have communications with my office, I want everyone up to speed on communication procedures and I want you all to keep an eye open over here in the Buford area," the Sheriff said. "I don't want you doing anything more than communicating with my office, though. If there's a problem, we'll send Deputies out to handle it. Colorado law requires P.O.S.T. They passed that law back in '03 and we'll have to get you into to compliance with the provisions of that bill. So, I may need to get you tested out or certified, I'll let you know. Meanwhile, you will all be acting under my direct supervision. I'll need the serial numbers of all the LEO only stuff you have,"

Janice was given the unofficial title of Dispatcher and Mary and Jack were classified a Special Reserve Deputies. There were a few training sessions required but they got them out of the way before spring. The one thing they had to do was meet the qualifying standards with their 'duty weapons', which the Sheriff in this instance did not provide. When Janice heard what was going on, she dug into those savings and bought mobile radios for all of their vehicles, 3 handheld radios and a radio and power supply for the shelter. She took the radios into the Sheriff's Department and had them tuned to the proper frequencies and got her Ham friend to install all of them.

The Ham was actually a part-time employee of the Sheriff's Department and it was he who set the frequencies on her radios. Given the problem with the cut RG-213/U cable, he recommended that she install a 100' Sabre Communications Corp. Monopole and mount the antennas much higher. One advantage of the Monopole was that the cables could be installed inside of the pole, protecting them from harm. The Ham's name was Ed and he was about Janice's age and a widower. He managed to come up with a used repeater from the Sheriff's Department and, with the Sheriff's permission, added a repeater to improve communications in the area.

The firefight had been at a distance of about 75 yards and it had seemed more like an arcade game to Jack and Mary. However, once Jack opened the blast door and saw all of the blood and gore, he reacted predictably. Mary had turned as pale as a ghost, but managed to keep everything down. There is something about shooting and perhaps killing another human being that changes you. It might seem imperceptible, but it happens, nonetheless.

Jack covered the hole with a piece of plywood and the next snowstorm had covered it over until spring. As soon as the weather permitted, he poured some concrete and lined the vertical part of their escape tunnel. He topped it with a slab and a manhole. The manhole was called a reservoir/security cover and it was spring assisted. The entire slab and cover was a couple of inches below grade and he added a light layer of soil to

hide them. Since he'd used treated plywood to line the actual tunnel, Jack decided that their money could be better spent on other things and he didn't make any more improvements to the tunnel.

That steel door had to be replaced and Jack had two  $\frac{3}{4}$ " steel plates laminated together and replaced the door with a real security door. It didn't use a regular latch and key; just slide bolts on the inside. That could be padlocked in place if they were inside. That Monopole tower had been erected about halfway between their cabin and Janice's. Not only had she equipped the vehicles and shelter and bought them handhelds, she added another radio to her home. Ed seemed to be hanging out with Janice more and more. There wasn't any talk of a marriage, at least not yet.

Colorado law set some specifics with respect to uniforms for Reserve Deputies, but the Sheriff told them not to bother. They wouldn't find themselves in any law enforcement situation if he had any say in the matter and they were only required to wear uniforms while on duty. He reiterated that their only function was to be his eyes and ears in that part of the County, something that they'd accomplished very well on 2 previous occasions. The only time he expected them to display their badges and credentials was if the ATF showed up and they'd cross that bridge when they came to it.

2013 looked to be worse than 2012 so far as the unrest in the country. The Democrat President had somehow managed to get reelected despite the mess the country was in. Probably the Republicans lacking a viable candidate but who knows? And when that SOB got reelected it only further fueled the flames of discontent. It wasn't really safe anywhere in the country. The UN was making all kinds of noises about sending Peace-keeping forces to the US, but in an act of bravado, the President said that if they did, he'd arrest the entire lot of them and nuke their countries, keeping them at bay. No doubt the President's threat was motivated by some of his advisors; he didn't seem like the type to want to keep the UN out.

"Well, I've had enough trouble to last me a lifetime," Jack told Mary.

"Me, too Jack," Mary agreed. "It looks like Mom has a new beau; that Ed has been coming around a lot lately."

"Are you ok with that?" Jack inquired.

"Why not? They have a common interest with the Ham radios and I've known Ed for a few years," Mary said. "His wife died of breast cancer. He was a wreck for a while, but seemed to come out of it. It will be good for Mom to have someone to spend some time with."

"I can't get over how the Sheriff reacted to our having all of those illegal arms," Jack added.

"Never saw yourself as a Special Reserve Deputy Sheriff?" Mary asked.



“Not really, no, now that you mention it,” Jack admitted. “That tunnel idea of yours was a real lifesaver. I should have done that a long time ago.”

“The only problem we had was that we were trapped with no way to communicate, Jack,” Mary observed. “That was what I was afraid of. Now, I don’t believe that they could have gotten through that blast door, but we’d have been cut off for a long time while you dug us out of there.”

“The Sheriff had some Deputies backtrack them,” Jack reported. “They were holed up on the north side of the South Fork River. Anyway, the Sheriff’s Department is now a whole lot better off with those seized ATV’s and snowmobiles. I suspect that the Sheriff won’t be turning those automatic weapons over to the feds or destroying them either.”

“It’s a crying shame that this country has come to this,” Mary observed. “I wonder how it’s all going to end up.”

“If this democracy survives, it will be the first time in history,” Jack remarked. “Whatever happens, there will probably be some fundamental changes in our form of government. The founding fathers of Rome and of the US never intended a strong central government. And, when the central government got too strong, it eventually led to a decline of the civilization. Our only hope is that we’re a Republic, ergo Constitutional Democracy.” (It’s specifically a Federal republic.)

“Daddy would have said that we should have returned to the 1950’s,” Mary chuckled.

“The country was having problems even in the 1950’s, but we had just won WW II and people couldn’t see the forest for the trees,” Jack explained. “We were recovering from the Great Depression and everything looked rosy, even though it wasn’t.”

“Still,” Mary said, “It had to be a lot better than what we have now.”

“Probably,” Jack agreed.

The United States had a turbulent history, if you examined it. The country had experienced a Civil War. Many believed the war to have been fought over the issue of slavery, but how you viewed that conflict depended upon where you came from. People down south called it ‘The War of Northern Aggression’. And as the country grew, the new Americans had committed genocide, nearly wiping out the Native Americans. The central government found that it couldn’t operate on the available funds and in 1913 had amended the Constitution to allow it to impose an income tax. And then, there had been all of those experiments in legislating morality; things like the Mann Act and Prohibition. Some lasted and some failed and then came the Great Depression. And, gun control wasn’t a new subject by any means. After the Civil War, people like Wyatt Earp had banned guns from towns. The big change came in 1934 when the Congress passed the National Firearms Act. It imposed a tax on certain firearms/equipment and became the

basis for many laws to come. By the way, on 1Dec03, the Supreme Court refused to hear *Silveira v. Lockyer*, a hotly contested case challenging states' rights to enact gun laws.

The Summers family and mother-in-law had now successfully dealt with 2 incidents, one from afar and one up-close and personal. The reason they'd been involved in 2 incidents was their location. They were right up against the White River National Forest and it was as likely a place as any for bad guys to go to ground. There were a series of National Parks and Forests in Colorado and no doubt if one were to examine them carefully, one would have found a lot more bad guys. But, that wasn't Jack and Mary's problem. They were only responsible for keeping tabs on the road to Buford.

You couldn't see the road from Jack and Mary's cabin, but Janice had a good view of it. She moved her Ham equipment, with Ed's help and could sit by the hour and look out the window, keeping tabs on the neighborhood. And then Ed moved in and they both could watch the road. They decided that they didn't want to get married and besides, it wasn't anyone's business. Jack had put up an unusually large amount of firewood during the spring of 2013 because the Farmer's Almanac predicted a terrible winter for 2013-2014. They planted a slightly larger garden and Janice helped Mary can all of the extra food. They found that the shelter was perfect for storing things like potatoes and onions, too, but it sort of gave the place a character of its own.

For their 10th birthdays, Robbie and Lane received the usual school clothes and such. They also received their own bugout bags. Junior had done a good job teaching Shep all he knew about keeping an eye on the family and now it didn't matter that Janice was occupied because each of the children had a dog to keep an eye on them. Yeah, right, I can just envision it. "Now, Shep, when a bear comes near, you warn Lane by pulling back your gums and giving out a low growl. And if you see a snake, you stay away. Just jump up and down and bark loudly." (Guard Dog 101)

Not everyone in the world during the summer of 2013 wanted to restore order to the United States. These people were very happy with the unrest in that far off land. They should have been content and just left the country to disintegrate on its own, but they decided to help it along. Never give a squabbling country a common enemy. More than once it has served to have the opposite effect of what you intended. Maybe Muslims didn't study history, or they would have known. After the death of Arafat in 2004, the Palestinians had their share of troubles with the Israelis and they blamed everything on the United States. The Israelis had made a lot of promises to the Palestinians and the world at large, but when it came right down to it, they were much more interested in preserving a Jewish homeland than sharing with the Palestinians. It had all started to go into the toilet when the Israelis refused to bury Arafat in Jerusalem.

## The Loner – Chapter 11 – Terrorists

With the United States embroiled in a bitter turmoil that was just short of a civil war, terrorists would have been wise to leave the country alone. There was some sort of an ‘us against them’ mentality that pervaded organizations like Hamas, however, and they screwed the pooch. It was a simple enough matter to bring down portions of the infrastructure in the United States. One thing that the Americans hadn’t done was to hurt their infrastructure. Any well-organized insurrection would have made that a high priority, in the opinion of the Palestinians, but the Americans hadn’t seen fit to crap in their own mess kit.

The PFLP decided that they could accelerate the demise in America by tearing apart that fragile infrastructure. Since there hadn’t been any attacks made by the homegrown militias, the military and the states hadn’t felt it necessary to guard any of it. While the power companies had made some improvements to the electrical grid, it was just as vulnerable as ever, perhaps even more so. And, the country had never really gotten away from its dependence on liquid fossil fuels. Admittedly, the US now generated a lot more electricity with low sulfur coal, but the United States was a mobile nation and once the Americans became accustomed to the higher prices for gasoline and diesel fuel, they slipped right back into producing gas guzzlers.

The attitudes in the United States seemed to vary from moment to moment. In the 1970’s when hit with the Arab oil embargo, the country had gone to fuel-efficient vehicles. But, by the turn of the 21st century, a SUV craze had hit the country and a whole lot of people had to have those 4-wheel drives. Most of them ate fuel like it was an ice cream cone on a hot summer’s day and the US had to go through a round of permanent price increases. Eventually the Americans adjusted, just like they always did, and it wasn’t all that long before they were back to driving gas guzzlers.

Life is nothing more than a series of lessons that you learn well or die. And, even learning those lessons isn’t a guarantee. But, it does improve your chances of survival. An understanding of history is an important prerequisite to learning those lessons because history has a way of repeating itself, over and over again. One just needs to be able to adapt those historical facts to the present situation and one has a pretty good idea what might happen next. Jack was an excellent student of history even though he’d stopped with a Bachelor’s degree. Thus in the late fall of 2013 when the power grid went down and pipelines were destroyed in several key locations around the US, Jack immediately recognized the situation for what it was.

“Sheriff, I don’t happen to believe that those bombings of the grid and the pipelines were the work of militias,” Jack said into the phone. “It’s just a little too convenient to suit me.”

“Jack, you’re guessing,” the Sheriff replied.

“That’s true, Sheriff, I am guessing,” Jack admitted. “But, don’t you find it awfully strange timing? If the militias were going to take out the power grid and the pipelines, why hadn’t they done it before now?”

“We haven’t heard anything from Homeland Security,” the Sheriff said, “Don’t you think they would have notified us if there were anything to worry about?”

“I suppose that you’re right Sheriff,” Jack reluctantly agreed. “Anyway, I can’t believe that if there were any terrorists in the country they’d end up in our area. They’d be more likely to go somewhere that they wouldn’t stand out from the rest of the population.”

The largest Muslim concentrations are in Los Angeles, NY, Chicago, and Washington DC ... the Detroit area, home to one of the largest concentrations of Arab-Americans ... California has one of the largest Muslim population concentrations in the United States ... These militants have targeted governments in their own Muslim world, confident that a tide of Islamic fundamentalism will sweep more moderate or secular rulers away. The fate of three nations in particular matter enormously to us: Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

I guess it depends upon which report you read or which website you visit where the greatest concentration of Muslims exists. Then again, that just means that the Palestinian terrorists would have more places to hide. Meeker, CO sure wasn’t one of those places. “Meeker, Colorado is the county seat of Rio Blanco County, situated in the northwestern part of the state. The population is about 2,400 people within the town limits. The elevation is 6,249 feet. Climate is typical of the western high country. Summer daytime high temperatures range from 70 to the mid-90’s, and evening lows from the mid-40’s to the high 50’s. Winter brings snow and cold temperatures, but the days tend to be sunny and humidity is always low. The town offers a gateway to the popular White River National Forest and the Flat Tops Wilderness Area.”

What about that road they lived on? ... Buford/Newcastle Road on well-maintained gravel roads in the summer or expertly groomed and marked snowmobile trails in the winter. The byway is closed for much of the winter, but is used extensively by snowmobiles. Sure was a good thing they were keeping that road open for the school bus by 2009 when the kids started school. Might have been real inconvenient if they hadn’t. And what about Colorado?

State Animal: Rocky Mountain Bighorn Sheep

State Bird: Lark Bunting

State Fish: Greenback Cutthroat Trout

State Flower: White and lavender Columbine

State Folk Dance: Square dance

State Fossil: Stegosaurus

State Gemstone: Aquamarine

State Grass: Blue Grama grass

State Insect: Colorado Hairstreak Butterfly

State Song: "Where the Columbines Grow" by A. J. Fynn, 1915

State Tree: Colorado Blue Spruce

State Holidays: Apart from the usual US non-holiday observances, the State of Colorado also orders the observance of the following dates:

Susan B Anthony Day: February 15

Arbor Day: 3rd Friday in April

Colorado Day: 1st Monday in August

Leif Erikson Day: October 9

So, apparently someone... terrorists or militias depending upon whom one asked, had taken out the electrical grid and blown up a bunch of pipelines. Back in the year 2004, a hurricane named Ivan blew into the Gulf of Mexico and the US ran real short of fuel for a while. I seem to recall the price of crude getting up to \$60 a barrel, briefly. Well now, imagine how short the US was on fuel now. The fuel delivery systems had been attacked and a whole lot of people were back to using those gas guzzler vehicles and they were in the middle of a near civil war. What else could go wrong? It's a whole lot easier to attack the electrical grid or pipelines than it is a national icon like, say, the Hoover Dam. And you don't even have to destroy refineries or power generation stations; all you have to attack is the distribution system to bring America to its knees. Remember Katrina and what it did to gas supplies?

Jack wasn't the only person in the country that realized that terrorists were behind the bombings. Those militia groups had a communications network via the Internet and after comparing notes, realized that none of them were behind it. But, by that time it was too late to find whoever was responsible. The PFLP made very certain that their people were safely tucked away before they claimed credit for their actions. All this accomplished was to make Homeland Security doubt their claims. And it wasn't until ATF labs analysis revealed high concentration of Semtex that the government began to believe the PFLP. Of course, they set out alerts to all of the state emergency management agencies once they'd figured it out, but that was like closing the barn door a day after the horse had left.

"Jack, I owe you an apology," the Sheriff said. "You were right all along about those bombings being the action of terrorists."

"What made you come to that conclusion, Sheriff?" Jack asked.

"The AFT figured it out and it started making its way down the chain about a week ago," the Sheriff explained. "You know, by the time we get information out here in the sticks, it's all but useless."

"Assuming that they did get it right, I still don't think we'll need to worry about the terrorists in Rio Blanco County," Jack repeated. "They'll probably just try to blend in with our population."

"I wouldn't give you 2 cents for the life of an Arab-American," the Sheriff observed. "The Army is looking for the terrorists and there have already been several incidents around the country where the militias have redirected their anger away from the government and toward Muslims."

"Already? That was quick," Jack commented.

"They apparently figured it out before the ATF," the Sheriff reported.

"We won't see anyone down this road much in the winter, Sheriff," Jack reminded. "What with it being a gravel road, they only grade it to Buford and we're just about the last road in the County to see the grader."

"Didn't used to grade it at all Jack," the Sheriff said.

"I sure remember that," Jack grinned. "The Farmer's Almanac says we're in for a tough winter."

"Is that why you lay in so much firewood?" the Sheriff asked.

"Farmer's Almanac is right more than it's wrong," Jack pointed out. "But, we probably won't see any snow for a few more weeks. My hunting reservations are sure down this year, I'll be glad when everything returns to normal."

"But, Jack," the Sheriff said, "We have a Democrat administration, these are the good times. What's going to happen when the Republicans get back in?"

"Sheriff, you've been listening to too much of your opponent's campaign material," Jack laughed.

"Well sir, I've got to get back to town," the Sheriff announced. "Say hi to Mary and Janice for me."

If you have a standby power system, you have to exercise it. Basically that means that once a week the system will start itself up and run for a few minutes. It keeps the engine lubricated and loose so that when you need it for real, it should start without any problem. The fancy standby home systems they have these days are basically large enough to run most any home. That means a 200-amp service would need a 200-amp generator to handle all possible loads without any interruption. Except, how many times has anyone ever actually used the full 200-amp service?

It's sort of like having extra flashlight batteries put up and never rotating them. The same thing goes for certain foods. You're going to have to rotate those canned goods from the store once a year at the maximum, or you're going to end up like Jack with some bulged cans. If you get any of those, throw them away, got that? It's real easy to get prepared, but getting prepared and being prepared isn't necessarily the same thing.

You have to stay prepared, that's the key. And, if you have to open a sealed can of ammo, it's best to add desiccant packs or shoot up the remainder. The latter is the better idea; everyone gets rusty without a little practice.

Hunting season the fall of 2013 was downright disappointing. Ever notice how many outfitters there are in the Meeker yellow pages? More than a couple and people weren't interested in hiring outfitters to go hunting that year. And, there were pack animals to feed and employees to pay and we can't forget the government with all of those fees Jack had to pay them every year. Now that's when being over prepared comes in a little handy and taking a couple of deer makes the meat last. A lot of people weren't interested in hunting any 4-legged critters; they were looking for two legged-critters with 'terrorist' written on their foreheads. Except even terrorists aren't that dumb, now are they?

And, the very last place in the US anyone would look for a terrorist would be in Colorado because they just plain stuck out like a sore thumb, what with being of Arab descent, right? Right, except things started to get too hot for some of them in places like LA and Chicago and Detroit and NY and Washington. So they bought themselves some parkas and some snowmobiles and headed where no one would look for them, like in the forests of Colorado. Of course, if anyone saw them, the observer would get real suspicious real quick, but they took great pains not to be seen. Beside, a lot of Americans took them for Mexicans if all they did was see them.

It was almost a perfect plan. But, some folks needed to hunt deer that year because they didn't make out so well with their business. Someone like Jack and Mary, who thought they spotted someone moving around in the White River National Forest who appeared to be a little out of place. But, it was only a fleeting look and they dismissed it and concentrated on their hunting. So much for their being the Sheriff's eyes and ears in that part of the County. Now be nice, it was only a fleeting glance from a fair distance and the guy looked Latino and he was carrying a scoped rifle.

## The Loner – Chapter 12 – Inadequate Preparations

Surely Jack and Mary didn't fit the description of being inadequately prepared. They'd spent years getting ready for every possible event. It had been a little here and a little there until Janice had shown up flush with cash. Then she'd seen to putting in some of the more expensive things, like the radios and such. Our friends in Colorado were not the people who were inadequately prepared. Well obviously the reference must be to those terrorists then. They had fled when the LEO's and militias had gotten too close and of all places to hide, had picked a National Forest in Colorado.

Apparently these guys didn't read the Frugal Squirrel website or any of the stories about getting prepared. If they had been smart, they'd have tried to cross one of the borders in some remote place and gotten into Canada or Mexico. And it wasn't that they lacked for money, several Muslim charities saw to their needs. What they lacked was the ability to go into a store and buy what they needed without attracting undue attention... which eventually led to them running short of supplies out there in that forest with a heavy-duty winter coming on. Jack and Mary had spotted one of them hunting for meat.

They had parkas and snowmobiles and had thought to bring several cans of gas. They were armed with the terrorist's favorite weapon, the AK, and had a couple of hunting rifles. Didn't have a whole lot of food, though. So, they had to go foraging. They started in Buford and took what they could find, sneaky like when the gas station was closed. The folks in Buford reported the crime to the Sheriff, but he really couldn't develop any leads. Jack, Mary, Janice and Ed hadn't seen a thing and told the Sheriff so. Then, Mary remembered the Latino hunter they'd caught a glimpse of and mentioned it to the Sheriff. The Sheriff thought it was probably just some guy from one of the bigger communities in western Colorado on a late season hunt.

Ed and Janice were over to Jack and Mary's one night for dinner and when they got home, Janice's home had been thoroughly ransacked and all of her food was missing. Now, that's all that was missing, food, but Janice had a pretty fair amount put up in her basement and it was a significant loss. The only type of evidence that the Sheriff's department could come up with was fingerprints. The thieves had apparently come right down the road from Buford on snowmobiles, or so the tracks would indicate. They'd jimmed the door and helped themselves. They hadn't tried to break into the small gun safe that Janice had, nor taken any of the communications equipment. What they didn't take told the Sheriff a lot about the thieves. And those snowmobile tracks petered out and the Sheriff had no idea where to look other than White River National Forest and that was a pretty big place.

But someone noticed that not all of the food was missing, none of the pork products had been taken. Through a process of elimination, they narrowed their suspects to Muslims or Jews and there wasn't anyone looking for people of the Jewish persuasion that the Sheriff knew of. Nationwide manhunts for some Muslim terrorists, but the Jews were home free at that particular time. It didn't take a PhD to put 2 and 2 together and come



up with 4. Naturally, the Sheriff put out the word to state and federal authorities that he might have some of those terrorists right there in his area.

Janice was po'd, as you might well imagine. It is such a violation to come home and learn that someone has gone through your home and helped themselves. She insisted on manning that radio 24/7 until the bad guys were caught or buried and she would have probably preferred the latter. Unfortunately, the weather refused to cooperate with the authorities and they couldn't send men out in what was turning into a howling blizzard. And, if there was any evidence of the terrorists' passage, the snowstorm completely obliterated it. And, after a few hours, Janice had to give up on her quest; a body needs its sleep.

Janice immediately had that door replaced with a steel door that was fixed up to look like a wood door and she installed locks that were difficult, but not impossible, to defeat. It made her feel a little bit better, but not much. Of course before that storm came, they had gone to Meeker and replaced most of the food, so Ed and she were set to ride out the storm. How does one describe how Janice felt? Righteous indignation? Naw, raw fury would probably be more accurate.

I realize that I haven't talked much about those solar panels on the roofs of the homes. They didn't lie flat on the roof; they were elevated to nearly a 45° angle. The problem with solar panels in a snowy part of the country was keeping the snow off. The only solution to that was to raise them to a high enough angle that the snow slid off. And, because solar panels are dark in color and positioned facing south, snow melts off the panels rather quickly when there is available sunlight. Which means that during a blizzard, what snow didn't slide off stuck, eliminating their output. But then, during the middle of a blizzard, the solar panels output was about zero anyway and the generator had to be started.

The other problem with solar panels is that elevating them to 45° degrees allows the wind to pass between the roof and the panels, chilling them. Not only that they become almost like the wings on an airplane and seem to want to fly away. So when you install them you anchor them extra good and then pray like the devil that the wind doesn't take them away. The Old Farmer's Almanac only claimed an 80% accuracy rate when it came to weather and they were off for the winter of 2013-2014. In western Colorado, the weather was far worse than predicted and they'd warned of a tough year.

In good years, the Colorado DOT and the locals had enough problems trying to keep the roads clear when it snowed. This year, that task turned into an impossible, or nearly so, feat and gravel roads like the Buford/Newcastle Road didn't see a grader all winter. It was like in the 'good old days'. Mary got on the cell phone and worked out a home schooling arrangement so the kids wouldn't lose a year of school. Cell phone because the phone lines were down and they couldn't be repaired until spring. (Jack's wrangler kept the livestock at his place so Jack didn't have to try and take care of the animals.)

And, that snow that was so deep on a 9' Indian went up to his chin this year. I don't suppose it makes much difference how deep the snow is if you have snowmobiles, but you do have to know where to look. Ever look at a map of Colorado and see how big the White River National Forest is north of I-70? The total Forest is 2.3 million acres. If you look closely at the map, you'll see that about  $\frac{1}{3}$  of the forest is in the northern section. What is that, 800,000-acres, give or take? It's about 1,200 square miles of National Forest, that's what it is and that assumes that they were in the northern section. The government had all kinds of choppers with FLIR and they made passes when the weather permitted, but deer and elk and bighorn sheep are warm blooded creatures and that's about all they came up with.

The government more or less gave up and did the next best thing. They set up road-blocks on all of the roads leading into the forest. Man, that must have been an awful job, let me tell you. And the northern section of the forest covers portions of 2 Counties, Rio Blanco and Garfield; and that doesn't even consider the small portions in Routt and Eagle Counties, or that tiny little piece in Moffat County. Those fellas sure did pick themselves a good place to hide; they could be in any one of 5 Country jurisdictions. Add to that the fact that they had snowmobiles and you can see that it was possible for them to be in any of those approximately 800,000-acres. The next home invasion occurred in the Glenwood Springs area and by the time the owners discovered their loss, the wind had wiped out any sign of snowmobile tracks.

Of course by this time, the feds had identified most of the terrorists from the fingerprints. Nobody most people had ever heard of but the Israelis had files on them. These were some bad actors, according to the Israelis, but then the Israelis thought all Palestinians were bad actors. And if they didn't, why had they been trying so hard for so many years to kill off Palestinians? Kind of makes you wonder, although I'm taking no political position here. But, apparently the Israelis stole the land from their Arab neighbors in the first place. Oh, that's right, it was the fault of the British; they were the ones who partitioned Palestine. Hard questions with no easy answers, don't you agree? The Palestinian question has a lot to do with what's wrong in the Middle East, even in 2014. A guy like Osama bin Laden had been angry over American forces being in Saudi Arabia. Imagine how much hatred that the Palestinians must have for the United States and its Israeli lackey.

Jack and Mary realized that the government and law enforcement was virtually helpless trying to find those terrorists. And, considering the amount of supplies they had on hand, were very concerned that they might be next. The incident in Glenwood Springs did nothing to lessen their anxiety, either. All it demonstrated was that the terrorists were inadequately prepared and reasonably mobile. But, they couldn't hide in that shelter all winter, either. It was tough enough just being stuck in the house most of the time.

Given the bombings of the pipelines and the electrical distribution system, the US was up to its butt in alligators. Imagine the effect of interrupting fuel oil supplies for 3-4 weeks during the fall of the year. There are a lot of homes heated by fuel oil and this was a bad winter, remember? Add to that the disruptions of the electrical delivery sys-

tem. When the US experienced blackouts, they typical related to the failure of a single part somewhere that brought the system down in a cascading effect. But, we're not talking about the failure of a single part here; it was more like hundreds, if not thousands, of parts destroyed that needed replacing. And, if terrorists could do something like that with Semtex, imagine what it would be like if someone made an EMP attack on the country. Halffast did in *Lights Out* and it was one hell of a mess.

The good side of the equation was that it eliminated most of the civil war. Americans banded together to fight a common enemy. The problem with that came with the fact that all Arabs looked alike. It's a corollary of the thing with Latinos; a lot of Americans just assumed that all Latinos were Mexicans. Yeah, and they probably just snuck in over the border, too. Thus it was with Arab-Americans, they were all nothing but a bunch of terrorists and everybody named Bubba knew that (with one possible exception). There are a whole lot of Bubba's in the US, in case you haven't noticed.

Let's get something straight here about Bubba. In American usage, bubba is a relationship nickname formed from brother and given to boys, especially eldest male siblings, to indicate their role in a family. For some boys and men, bubba is used so pervasively that it replaces the given name. The nickname may also be used outside the family by friends as a term of affection.

Janice decided that she needed an alarm system in case those terrorists came back. So, she purchased a full-grown German Shepherd that had been trained as a Guard Dog. That worked fine; it took Jack and Mary and the kids a while to feel comfortable visiting Janice's home. That fully trained, level 3, family/executive protection dog, his name was Izzy, set Janice back about \$3,500. It would be interesting to see how Junior, Shep and Izzy get along in the shelter if they had to go down there again.

The terrorists never came back and the next place they hit was in Rifle. This time they got enough supplies to last them well into spring. Same guys, the fingerprints said so, but they were cunning and got away cleanly, one more time. The truth was that that incident didn't really make either Jack or Mary feel any better. They didn't know that the terrorists had enough supplies to last them until spring, so how could they? But, Jack sure didn't forget to exercise the generator anymore; during those few times it wasn't running. A generator is an expensive way to get electricity, but so is solar power. What he really needed was a wind turbine, but they weren't cheap either. A used 15kw wind turbine was for sale on the Internet for only \$16,500, delivered.

Then he calculated how much it was costing him to run the generator,  $2,000 \times \$3.50$  equaled \$7,000 that particular year. And, Janice had a generator, too. Once he factored all of the costs in, Mary and he went to Janice and brought up the issue of buying and installing a used 35kw wind turbine. Janice was quick to point out that even having a wind turbine wouldn't solve their problem because when the winds got too high, you couldn't use them either. Still it made sense to her and it appeared to be just a question of when she spent the money and what she spent it on. While there were areas near there where there wasn't enough wind to run a turbine, areas rated a 2, they figured out

that their area was rated a 6. The highest rating was only a 7, so they were in good shape.

Come spring, they would look for available used wind turbines and have one installed. The only requirement that Janice imposed was that they get something in the 50-60kw range. Eventually the winter of 2013-2014 passed into history and they hadn't heard anything more about the terrorists. Now, if you went hunting and you were walking, how far would you be from home? 2-3 miles give or take? Guess where those terrorists were? Remember, they'd spotted one of them when they were deer hunting. Say about 3 miles as the crow flies, not far at all. I also told you that the terrorists had plenty of money, if I recall.

When the roads opened up, the terrorists slipped out of White River National Forest and headed for Grand Junction to lie in supplies. Grand Junction had a population in 2014 approaching 50,000 and they didn't particularly stand out. But to get to Grand Junction, they had to pass right by Janice's house. She didn't see them on the outbound trip and they'd skirted the roadblock and thought they were home free. They rented a truck in Grand Junction and filled it at a grocery wholesaler's, paying cash. It was on the trip back to the forest that they were spotted. Janice didn't think that it made much sense for a Ryder Rental to be driving down the road and radioed the Sheriff.

Those terrorists stopped right down the road from Janice's house and unloaded the truck and then drove it on to just short of Buford, where they abandoned it. By the time some Deputies showed up, there was nothing to see, unless you find an empty abandoned truck exciting. Janice took no particular note of the SUV that was following the truck at a distance. It was just a couple of Mexicans anyway.

Jack located a 70kw used wind turbine in Canada and had it shipped to Colorado. It was installed near the Monopole about ½ way between the homes and the electrical feeds were placed in conduit. After they'd refilled the diesel fuel tanks for the generators, Janice expressed the hope that that wind turbine would cut their fuel consumption drastically, she wasn't made of money, you know. With the wind turbine installed, the folks had more energy than they could use. The electric company figured it cost about \$10,000 a mile to put in power lines and for the amount of energy available it still wasn't worth it. The reason that they had no electricity in the first place was that Jack couldn't pay \$10,000 a mile to have power run to the acreage.

"Jack you might run into those guys when you're out cutting firewood," the Sheriff said. "If it were I, I'd have someone go along and ride shotgun."

"Normally, I'd disagree, Sheriff, but you might have something there," Jack said. "I suppose I can see if Mary wants to cover my six."

"Where do you plan to cut this year?" the Sheriff asked.

"About three miles from here, that's the area on my permit," Jack explained.

“So far, we’ve come up with prints on six different individuals, so you keep your heads up,” the Sheriff expressed concern, “And, just because we only have six sets of prints doesn’t mean that that’s all there are.”

“We’ll be careful Sheriff,” Jack assured him. “We have that repeater and we can take our handi talkies with us and give you a shout if we run into trouble.”

The next morning Jack and Mary set out in the pickup to gather logs. Jack had a chainsaw and a can of gas and they both had AR15’s and all 30 of those magazines. Maybe Jack was being over cautious, but he threw in an extra can of ammo. They moved into the woods and got to the area described on the permit where there were several dead-falls that the Park Service wanted cleared. Jack fired up the chainsaw and began to cut the logs into 16” lengths and Mary stood guard.

The terrorists heard the chainsaw start up and grabbed their rifles. They cautiously approached the area the sound was coming from because they’d never heard a chainsaw before. They saw a man sawing up wood and a woman with an assault rifle. The men decided that even though the people were armed, they didn’t represent any trouble and they began to return back to their camp. The rules for handling firearms safely suggest that you should keep you weapon on safe and your finger off the trigger. These rules exist for a reason. What, for example, would happen if your gun wasn’t on safe, you had a round chambered and your finger was on the trigger when you tripped over a root?

Jack had just turned off the chainsaw and reached for the gas can to refill it when the shots rang out. Mary dropped to the ground and Jack dived for his rifle. They both came up with their AR’s pointed in the direction the shots came from. Jack grabbed his radio and shouted, “10-33, 10-33, shots fired. This is Jack at the permit area 3 miles from our house.” In most jurisdictions 10-33 means ‘Emergency Traffic’. The Sheriff had a pretty good idea where Jack’s permit area was and he had his people call the Park Rangers to confirm it while he and several Deputies were en-route to the scene. Neither Jack nor Mary returned fire and they were still on the ground with rifles pointed when the 3 Broncos/Blazers pulled in.

The thing that I like about Country Western music is that it’s filled with all of that good advice like, *Mama, don’t let your babies grow up to be cowboys*. Nobody had called Jack ‘Cowboy’ in a very long time and he wasn’t acting like one either. That was a good way to get killed if you didn’t know how many people you were up against or just exactly where they were. Several State Patrol cars arrived within minutes, as did the military from a couple of the roadblocks. With all of the LEO’s around, Jack and Mary discretely dug out their Reserve Deputy badges and hung them from their pockets. Reserve Deputies wear the same badges as regular Deputies, only the uniform is different, and they weren’t in uniform because they were just out cutting wood and didn’t own any uniforms anyway. You did remember that, right?

Those M4-FA suppressors attracted a little attention but with the badges... Jack and Mary indicated where they thought the shots came from and a Deputy checked. He found 3 7.62x39mm casings. The Army had stationed some AH-64 attack helicopters and UH-60 Blackhawk's in Grand Junction and they were already airborne. The Park Rangers informed the Sheriff's office that they were going to let the military handle the situation.

"Jack, Mary and you did well," The sheriff said. "Now, I want the 2 of you to stay out of it and just stay here and guard the vehicles. We're fanning out to cut off other avenues of escape and you folks can cut off this one."

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The terrorists were on the move. That accidental discharge had revealed their presence and they got the rest of their party, the few remaining supplies and headed north. When the Army arrived with the Blackhawks and the Special Forces, they landed well north of the Sheriff's position and spread out, intending to move south toward the Sheriff's position. One of the Apaches picked up the group of terrorists in its FLIR began to make strafing runs. The other Apache joined it and they had the terrorists pinned down. The terrorists dove for cover under some rocky outcroppings and they were safe, for the moment. The AH-64's were configured for a ground-suppression mission and had 1,200 rounds of 30mm cannon ammo plus 38 2.75" rockets on each side. What they didn't have was a lot of staying power. Fortunately there was fuel and ammo prepositioned at the Meeker Airport.

The SF troops moved in and that should have ended the entire affair right then and there. It did for most of the group, but 2 managed to slip away and head straight south. Without the Apaches and their electronics to spot the 2 departing terrorists, the SF didn't realize they had gotten away. Those 2 terrorists were the leaders of the 2 cells and by far the most experienced of the group. These 2 men presumed, correctly, that the Americans would only leave a small force guarding their vehicles. They had SF to their rear, and were flanked on either side by LEO's so they went right down the middle. By the time the Apaches refueled and rearmed at the Meeker Airport, the 2 terrorists were well south of where the others were trapped.

"There are the vehicles and it appears they left them unguarded," the first man pointed.

"It is the will of Allah," the second man said. "But wait, let's us proceed cautiously."

"Jack, I have 2 guys at 2 o'clock," Mary whispered.

"I see them, but I don't have a clear field of fire," Jack whispered back.

"Neither do I," Mary agreed.

“Just wait, they’ll have to come into the open to get to any of these vehicles,” Jack suggested.

One of the terrorists thought he heard something but they watched and couldn’t see anything. Finally, they decided that they couldn’t wait any longer and cautiously approached the vehicles. They never heard the shots that killed them and wouldn’t if Jack or Mary had missed. That M4-FA suppressor is very efficient.

“Sheriff, this is Jack,” Jack said into his radio. “Mary and I just took out 2 of the guys sneaking back here to get vehicles.”

“10-4, Jack,” the Sheriff said, “The SF guys got 6 of them up here. Hold tight and we’ll be there shortly.”

That was the third time Jack and Mary had been involved in something involving bad guys. Jack concluded that it just sort of went with the territory, what with them being up next to a National Forest. Mary wasn’t so sure she wanted to live there anymore if it was going to be part of a continuing struggle with bad guys. But, neither of them voiced their thoughts. They probably both realized that they had a tremendous investment in those two acres. They had a shelter, communications tower and now a wind turbine. A person couldn’t just pick up and leave a setup like that. Anyway, the 3rd time is a charm; they probably would never see another bad guy.

## The Loner – Chapter 13 – Wish in One Hand

And spit in the other. See which one fills up the fastest. Jack had it about right and Mary was smart to be concerned. With those 8 terrorists dead, life more or less returned to normal. Jack spent a lot of time putting up wood this year. That last winter had used up almost all of his supply. Man, it had been a humdinger with record snowfalls and extremely unusual weather conditions. But, business wise, things were looking up. The military and militias had rooted out most of the terrorists and people were more interested in hunting. By early July, he had his fall season booked. One outfitter had given up the business and Jack hired his men and bought him out. The Wells Fargo branch in Meeker had been a little reluctant, but when Jack showed them his bookings had loaned him the money to buy the guys stock and equipment.

By late August, Jack also had enough bookings to keep everyone fully occupied during the hunting season. The Old Farmer's Almanac predicts the weather using some formula based on sunspots. The winter of 2014-2015 was predicted to be worse than the winter of 2013-2014. Maybe that's why Jack had laid in so much firewood. The Almanac also predicted that the winter would come late, but when it came the country was in for some serious weather. The twins were 11 and old enough, in Mary's opinion, to hunt on their own. Sounds a little young to me, but I suppose I was hunting pheasant by the time I was that age, I really can't remember. At least the economy was starting to pick up a little, and Janice's 401k was producing income at the previous levels. And, she'd had another birthday and had applied for Social Security, based on Paul's earnings.

Mary had a degree from the University of Wisconsin in Elementary Education. During the summer of 2014, she did all of the things necessary to get her teaching credentials from the state of Colorado, although when she found time to do so is a mystery. Her mother and she had planted the usual sized garden because it didn't make any sense to grow more food than a person could eat in a year. They carefully rotated the foods in the shelter, making certain that nothing expired. And, with the wind turbine, Jack had to go with an automatic transfer switch so he no longer had to exercise that 30kw generator.

The twins received the usual gifts for their birthdays on August 12th, except that each received a shotgun from Paul's extensive collection. Mary was the wing shot in the family and she took them out and taught them to use the shotguns. Junior had a touch of arthritis, but he was doing well for an 11-year-old dog. Those 3 German Shepherd's had gotten used to each other's company and the only thing that didn't work out well was that Junior had to relinquish his position of Alpha male to Izzy. Not that it made any difference; they didn't have any female dogs.

Because of the late snowfall, the hunt went especially well that year and Jack managed to squeeze in a couple of last minute clients when other clients scored early. The snow came in November, the day after elections. It was an off year and the Republicans gained a 2-seat 'majority' in the House and a 1-seat advantage in the Senate. The next 2 years ought to prove interesting for the White House. Even laying in extra feed and



such for the livestock, still all housed at the wrangler's and paying the first installment on the loan to Wells Fargo, Jack and Mary were in pretty good financial condition, for a change. Janice had added another 5,000-gallon diesel tank when she heard that the Almanac was predicting an unusually bad winter, increasing their fuel total to 17,000 gallons.

The Sheriff's Department was full up on snowmobiles and they didn't use ATV's so the Sheriff signed out 4 of each to Jack and Mary. Two went to Janice and Ed and two stayed with Jack and Mary. They were still the Sheriff's eyes and ears in that part of Rio Blanco County. Mary had picked up the 5th grade material from the school in Meeker and she had begun the kids' lessons the same day that school started in town. Having a Mom for a schoolteacher had its downsides, but the kids were getting a better education than they'd have ever gotten in town. By the way, it was finally Mom and Dad now, but that had taken a while.

Scientists had discovered that the problems with wind turbines and high winds pertained to the accumulation of dead bugs on the blades. Many turbines could safely operate in winds up to 100mph if the blades were only clean. The last thing that Jack did before that first snowstorm was to clean the blades on the wind turbine. With that chore out of the way and all of the firewood stacked for easy access, they were ready when the first really big storm blew in the day after elections in 2014. That storm lasted for several days, during which the wind turbine never shut down. With winds gusting to 70mph, that was just as well.

"Mary, I've been keeping track of the storms ever since we got that laptop," Jack said one evening. "Unless I'm terribly wrong, the storms have been getting worse each year. It ended the drought, but if the Almanac is right, we're going to need a SnowCat to get around."

Life throws us a few curves and if it's not one thing, it's another. We've had an insurrection and some bad guys a few times in this story, but what if God is mad at us? Might explain the weather, or maybe that's just something we've done to ourselves and Nature is correcting our errors. Now, as I recall, I did a piece on abrupt climate changes; I don't suppose any of you downloaded and saved a copy did you? More's the pity.

Many scientists believe that a period of global warming will be followed by a period of global cooling as Nature evens out the balance of things. Maybe that was what Jack was worried about. If there is one thing we haven't learned to control, it is the weather. Hells bells, we're not even all that good at predicting it. That Old Farmer's Almanac is actually about as good as the weathermen, but they use a secret method, from what I've read. A 9' Indian would have had to stand on a tall stump to avoid the snow covering him completely during the winter of 2014-2015.

"What's the big deal, Jack?" Mary asked. "We have those snowmobiles the Sheriff gave us. And that wind turbine is mounted with the axle at 50 meters. So what if we get snowed in?"

“That’s not what’s bothering me Mary,” Jack said. “I know that we’re all right on electricity now that we have a wind turbine, BUT, the intake and exhaust pipes for the generator are buried under 5’ of snow meaning that we can’t run the generator unless I shovel them out.”

“You’d better dig out Mom’s intake and exhaust pipe while you’re at it unless you want them living over here,” Mary chuckled. “And, you’re going to have to dig out that path to the shelter again.”

“That’s what I mean, Mary, those Snow Cats have a blade to move snow around,” Jack explained.

“I just seems like if it’s not one thing, it’s another,” Mary said. “It’s a tough world we live in today. We have to deal with terrorists and most of the world not liking the United States. There isn’t a dime’s worth of difference between the major political parties and they seem to be doing what’s good for them instead of what’s good for the country. Ten years ago we were in a drought and now we have too much snow. Even though Daddy was a survivalist, I’d have never believed that we would have to actually use a shelter.”

“I know, honey,” Jack said. “Maybe these are the 1,000-years of tribulation it talks about in Revelations.”

“And maybe it’s technology growing faster than our ability to keep up with it,” Mary countered. “Sometimes I wonder what type of a world we’re leaving for Lane and Robbie.”

Mary hit the nail right on the head with that remark. Parents have been wondering the same thing since the dawn of civilization. And the answer in 2014 was exactly the same as it had been every time a parent had asked the question. The more things change, the more they stay the same. Whales were a perfect example. They were hunted to near extinction for their oil until something better came along. The first principal use of whale oil was as an illuminant in lamps and as candle wax. Other uses came in time. In the 1700’s it was noted that the burning oil from sperm whales glowed brightly and clearly and did not have a disagreeable odor like the oil from right whales did (Bonner, 1989). The sperm whale was the main whale being sought for its oil when the petroleum industry opened in 1859. The whale fishery, however, was in a declining state and had been so a decade or more before Drake struck petroleum in his drilled well and before general refining of crude oil commenced in Oil Creek Valley and elsewhere.

One would think that there would have been a great competitive clash between whale oil and kerosene from coal (coal oil) and petroleum in the opening years of the 1860’s. However, these illuminants did not earnestly join in battle for the US market at that time because the Civil War, beginning in April 1861, brought the New England whaling fleet to a virtual halt. A large number of the whaling ships were captured and sunk by the Confederacy. This hazard made an expedition perilous before the whaling waters were

even reached. Nevertheless, the reversal was weathered and sperm whale oil production carried on with its normally expected highs and lows.

If kerosene saved the whales, what would it be that saved humanity from eventually dying off? There had been some sort of war on the face of the planet since who knew when. If an ice age didn't get us, like scientists warned; what about an asteroid or meteor? Or would religious fervor push the Muslims to the point that they were against the rest of the world? As the moment, the enemy seemed to be the snow; all 10' of it and it was only February 2015. No wonder Jack was worried. And there was no way he could afford a Snow Cat and he wasn't about to bring it up to Janice.

Some people misunderstand generosity. Or mistake someone doing something for the common good as generosity that is motivated by trying to buy friendship. Either way, Jack was determined not to ask Janice to buy one more thing, especially not the Snow Cat. When people think they are being bought, they develop deep resentments and while Jack didn't presume that Janice had any ulterior motive in her spending, it made him feel inadequate. Mary was right, he figured, they did have the snowmobiles from the Sheriff. Besides, who wanted to go out in this weather anyway? But, he still wanted a Snow Cat. He really liked the looks of the Series Diplomat. Wish in one hand...

With the dish, Jack could get on the web. He found used Sno-Cats starting at \$12,500 and going up to \$122,000, but he couldn't find any used Series Diplomats and figured that he probably couldn't afford one if he could find one. He finally found a used 10 passenger Poncin Diesel Minibus for \$20,000. He was so excited that he showed his find to Mary. She thought that the vehicle would be just the ticket and he told her it was only a dream, they could never afford it. A few days later, he went back to the website to look at the Minibus again and it was marked 'sold'. Oh well.

Did I mention what Mary gave Jack for Christmas? You know that grease stained old straw hat he wore? Yep, you got it, she finally bought him a new one that fall on sale and put it up for Christmas. It was a Wrangler brand just like his first one. Anyway, back to the present. About 4 weeks later, sometime in March, one of those Snow Cats pulled up out front of the cabin. Jack did a double take when he saw it was Janice driving the thing. It seems that Mary had said something to Janice and Janice, and well, you can guess what happened.

"Is that the Poncin Diesel Minibus that I saw on the web?" Jack asked.

"The one and the same, Jack," Janice replied. "And don't get worked up over my buying it. Mary mentioned it to me and I talked it over with Ed. It's a fair distance to Meeker and a hospital and what if someone got hurt or sick? We've just been lucky, that's all. Anyway, the pension paid a bonus distribution this year and I had the money so I spent it. You can't take it with you and I'd just feel awful if someone died because I was too cheap to buy what we needed."

“You want to stay for supper?” Jack asked. “Mary put on a big roast with spuds and vegetables.”

“That would be nice,” Janice said, “Thanks.”

The Snow Cat was a 1990 Poncin Minibus, 8 wheel All-Terrain Vehicle with winter and summer tracks. It was built in France, and carried 10 passengers, 2 in front, and 8 in the rear, heated compartment. It had a 4 cylinder Renault diesel engine, about 75 hp, with a 5-speed transmission. Purchased new in 1990, it only had 457 hours on it and was in good condition. It had 2 sets of tracks. One rubber, and the other is rubber with aluminum cleats. It could also run on just the tires. Steering was controlled by braking each side of the main axle, and spare parts were included.

Janice told them that if they'd run Ed and her home later in the evening, they could park the Minibus at their cabin. She also suggested that with the snow as deep as it was that Jack ought to consider doing something to connect the shelter to the house. While she didn't think it likely that they needed to use the shelter in the middle of the winter, if they did need to use it, this wasn't the time to be shoveling a lot of snow. Jack kept a path shoveled to the shelter entrance so he could attend to the equipment and access the freezers, but Janice did have a point.

Ed suggested that they should build a trellis that ran from the shelter to the front porch of the cabin. Just before the first snowfall each year, they could drape it in canvas and create what amount to a tunnel to the shelter. Maybe that wasn't the best idea Jack had ever heard, but it beat the hell out of whatever was in second place. He told Ed that the trellis would have to be pretty sturdy if it was to support the weight of all that snow, which was assuming that next winter was as bad as this one. Ed told him that he wouldn't be one bit surprised if the next winter weren't even worse than this year; the winters seemed to run in cycles.

Now, Jack had been there since 2004 and he hadn't seen any cycles so he asked Ed about it. Ed said that in his experience, there were 2 cycles, 11 years of drought followed by 11 years of ever worse winters. He had lived through almost 3 of those cycles and he was firmly convinced that the next 3-4 years would only be worse. Ed also said that every year the winter would come earlier. That wasn't good news for Jack because it might start to cut into the hunting season. He decided right there and then that he had to 'make hay while the sun shined'. And, he'd better think about lying in extra supplies of wood for each winter. After he took Janice and Ed home, Jack sat down to visit with Mary.

“I really like that Minibus, honey,” Jack said, “But I'm torn between being happy we have it and resentful that I couldn't buy it.”

“It was a really good idea, Jack,” Mary replied. “Someone had to think of it and you did. That's enough for me. Mom has money to burn and she was right to buy it. We are an awfully long ways from Meeker if we needed help.”

“They could always get up a chopper, Mary,” Jack suggested.

“In the weather we’ve been having?” she chuckled, “Not hardly!”

Jack let it go and started to think about the trellis that Ed suggested they build. He finally hit on the idea of building it out of conduit because he’d seen some sections of conduit that had been rolled into quarter circles at a junkyard. That was more his speed, anyway, buying stuff from a junkyard. The next morning he called the junkyard in Meeker to check on the used conduit. Yes, they still had it in stock, nobody wanted bent conduit and yes, they had some short lengths of the same 2” conduit, about 8’ long. Did Jack want anything else? How about some metal strapping maybe 1”-2” wide? More than he could ever use, they told him. Jack suggested that they hold it all for him and that they’d come to Meeker the next day and check it out. The guy at the junkyard wanted to know when they plowed the road out and Jack told him that he was coming by Snow Cat.

The ground was frozen too hard to do anything about that trellis until spring, but Jack wanted to get a jump on it the minute the ground thawed. If Ed was right about the winters, this was a high priority. The next day, they picked up 48 of the curved sections and 48 of the 8’ lengths of conduit. Rather than figuring out how to connect the pieces, they stopped by a hardware store and picked up 72 2” couplings and a couple of boxes of ¼” by 2½” bolts and nuts. Jack had decided that he wouldn’t need to set the posts in concrete because once the trellis was interconnected it would be pretty rigid. And while they were in town, he treated Mary, Lane and Robbie to dinner at the Main Street Café.

The canvas, he figured could be picked up at any time during the coming summer. It looked to be a busy summer, too. He wanted to put in 20 or more cords of wood after he erected the trellis. Jack figured to space the trellis uprights about 3’ apart and put a strap every 2’ around the circumference. The straps would support the canvas and if he buried the poles about 30” in the ground they would have a tall tunnel through the snow, all the way from their front porch to the shelter entrance.

## The Loner – Chapter 14 – Preparing for Snow

When spring finally came, it was too muddy to gather wood so Jack started in on the trellis. He had it done in a few days and it appeared to be just what they needed to guarantee access to the shelter. There was something else nagging at his brain, something he'd told Mary. Finally it occurred to him that he needed to extend the intake and exhaust pipes for the generator. While he was at it he did the same to Janice's. Unsupported, the pipes looked pretty darned flimsy, so he put in light poles and strapped the pipes to the poles with standoffs. He also mounted extra yard lights to explain away the poles. No sense waiving a red flag; on the other hand that tunnel would be a dead give-away. Still, who would be out, running around in that much snow?

Once he got started putting up wood, Jack got on a roll. Before he was done, he'd stacked up 25 cords of wood for himself and another 25 for Janice. Oh yes, Janice had a Franklin stove too. It heated her home rather handsomely. Jack had replaced the old wood burning stove with an electric stove but hadn't discarded that old stove. He had it stored in a shed with a bunch of other junk. Electricity wasn't a problem, but ever since they'd taken out the wood kitchen stove, their cabin had been noticeably cooler in the winter. So, Jack took out the electric stove, moved it to the shelter to replace the hot plates, put the wood stove back in the kitchen and the hot plates in the shed. Waste not, want not.

Fifty cords of wood is a lot of wood. A cord is 128 cubic feet or a pile 4x4x8. That was a lot of wood to split, but with the hydraulic splitter, the wrench in the works was hauling the split wood and stacking it. I'll bet that Robbie and Lane were wondering if Lincoln really freed the slaves. And, they were only 11 years old, so they couldn't really stack the wood 6' high like Jack wanted. But, they could get it 4' high and the wood was 16" long making for 3 layers 4' high and 8' long per cord. Jack only stacked the wood 6' high because his name was Jack, not Shaq. It took quite a while to harvest, split and stack the wood and when he finished both Janice and he would have had piles 4' deep by 6' high by 133 feet long, had he stacked it in a row. There was no way he was going to run out of firewood anytime soon.

That got them well into summer. Then, that wrangler Jack had offered to buy him out. Jack considered the offer carefully. He was still a young man, but the business might fall onto hard times if the winters were as bad as Ed was predicting. He told the wrangler he was willing to sell, but it had to be cash up front. It is sort of difficult to put a price on an outfitting business. You can add up the value of the stock and equipment, however, and then factor in the profits from a year or two of business. They arrived, finally, at a price and the wrangler had enough cash that Wells Fargo was willing to let him take over Jack's loan and advance him the remainder. There is that thing called 'Goodwill' that's always a factor in selling a business. Goodwill represents the intangible value of the business's reputation. Jack figured the goodwill at 2 years of last year's profits, his best year ever. The problem with goodwill from an accounting standpoint is that it has to be amortized over an extended period.

While they had money in the bank for about the first time in their lives, there wasn't enough to generate enough income for the family to live off of. Thus Jack still needed a job. He'd agreed to a covenant not to compete with the wrangler, so he couldn't start a new outfitting business for 5 years, the term of the covenant. And none of the outfits were hiring so Jack wasn't sure what to do. With time on his hands, he decided he might just as well put it to good use and put up more firewood. Mary said that he ought to put an ad in Rio Blanco Herald Times and sell the extra wood. He checked the paper and found an ad for firewood, "Pinyon: full cords - split \$165, cedar/pinyon mix \$150."

The White River National Forest is managed according to a plan. A plan that was hotly contested in the courts. But, Jack was able to secure a permit to remove additional deadfall. So, he began harvesting the deadfall and got the kids to help him split and stack the firewood. Mary put an ad in the paper for him and he began to sell firewood. Most people don't think about firewood until the fall and by the time the fall came, Jack and the kids had another 75 cords of firewood harvested, split and stacked. Most people who sell firewood claim that they can get a cord in the bed of a pickup. Jack made sure that he delivered a full cord, all 128 cubic feet even if it meant 2 trips. Good businessman, that Jack, he managed to sell 60 cords of firewood for \$150 a cord. That was \$9,000 and he had a leg up on the next year. So, he continued working right up to the first snow in early October and put up another 25 cords.

Since the Lane and Robbie had worked so hard to help him out, Mary and Jack gave them each \$1,000, \$900 of which went into a saving account. The kids were now 12 years old and they never had a big allowance so they thought that they had died and gone to Heaven. Taking out for gas for the chainsaw and hydraulic log splitter and diesel fuel to deliver the wood still left Jack with a nice profit for the summer. It was more than they needed to live on, that's for sure. He figured that once word got around that he actually delivered a full cord of wood rather than a pickup load that his business would improve.

He had picked up some weatherproof tarps and Ed helped him cover the trellis before the first snowfall. It took 3 18'x24' tarps to cover the trellis and they anchored them with baling wire. Jack used white colored tarps to blend in with the snow. Remember Vaughn Monroe? *Let it Snow, Let it Snow, Let it Snow* plus *Riders in the Sky*? Jack was ready for the snow all right. His 300-gallon diesel tank and the 2,000 and 5,000-gallon tanks were full; he had 65 cords of firewood, his 25, the 15 he hadn't sold and the additional 25. He'd bought and butchered a steer and the freezer was full of meat and the other with pork, chicken and vegetables. Plus, they had canned goods from the garden and all of the survival rations. And, he had rented a cherry picker and cleaned off the blades of that wind turbine. How prepared is prepared?

Cleaning the blades of the turbine had been a chore and then some. Jack rented the biggest cherry picker, boom lift, he could get and it only reached to 40 meters. The blades were mounted 50 meters high and those extra 33' had given him quite a concern. He ended using a jury-rigged telescoping pole to clean the blades. The first year, he had gone up the pole and slid down the blades in a harness and he thought that this

would be easier. Next year, he planned to do it the first way. He knew that he had to keep those blades clean in case of high winds. And, you think you had troubles.

I said the snow started in early October. By the end of October, the trellis was completely under snow and Jack had to move the Snow Cat almost daily to avoid it getting buried. Then, it cleared up for a few days and they decided to go hunting. Season didn't end until mid-November and they wanted some venison for the freezer. You can't hunt from a vehicle, but where does it say that you can't use a vehicle to get to the hunting area? It does? I missed that. Anyway, they took the Snow Cat and got to an area that wasn't buried in snow and found a herd of deer. They parked about ½ mile away and stalked the animals. Both Mary and Jack were using their Super Match rifles with the 5-round magazines. Those rifles were just so much more accurate than their model 70's.

Both of them took a legal buck and Mary stood guard while Jack returned for the Snow Cat. They didn't bother to gut them because the dogs would have a field day if they waited. I hope what they did was legal; we wouldn't want to put our heroes in a position where they had to shoot a Game Warden. Let's see, they stalked them, they were legal bucks and season was still open. I think they got by. And they had a bunch of venison to butcher, too. Sure was a good thing that Mary had been using up veggies from the freezer. Jack hadn't kept the path to the smokehouse clear so they couldn't smoke any jerky. And since it was too cold outside and too warm inside to age the meat, they cut and wrapped it and put it in the freezer.

Mary was having a problem, too. She had learned to bake bread in the woodstove. Then, they gone to the electric stove and she had to learn all over again. Now, they had the woodstove back in the kitchen and she was relearning how much wood to use to get the bread to come out perfect. With a woodstove, a skilled person could build the perfect fire and then just forget all about the bread. It didn't matter how long you left the bread in the oven, it would come out perfect every time. Provided, of course, that you had the fire right in the first place. Fortunately for the family, there were periods between snowstorms when they could all get out of the cabin.

"How about we pick up Ed and Janice and drive the Snow Cat to Meeker for an early supper?" Jack offered.

"We need to ditch the kids and go by a gun shop," Mary replied.

"Gun shop? We have enough guns and ammo to fight World War III. What do we need to go to a gun shop for?" Jack responded.

"Robbie wants a rifle for Christmas," Mary explained.

"He's only 12 years old, Mary. What kind of a rifle does he want?" Jack inquired.

"He wants a Remington .308 caliber bolt-action rifle," Mary said.



"The 308 Win has its place in military history and hunting. It's hard to say anything negative about the caliber as a whole but I don't think it makes a very good youth caliber. It's difficult to get the recoil down with the heavier bullets," Jack responded. "In my opinion, the 308 Win should be used by adults."

"Maybe, but that's what he wants," Mary argued.

"That's one hell of a lot of money to spend on a Christmas present," Jack countered.

"Whatever it costs, double it, honey," Mary said. "We can't spend that much money on Robbie unless we spend the same on Lane."

"Does she want a rifle too?" Jack asked.

"No, she wants a computer," Mary said.

They had the money, that wasn't the issue. The issue was that given Robbie's size, he'd be better off with a youth model. But, while they were at the store, Jack learned that there was only a 1" difference in the length of pull. So, he could buy a rifle now and a rifle later or spend more money and get a nicer full-sized rifle now and just let Robbie grow into it. They decided on a Model 700 VS. Great dimensional stability came from an aramid fiber reinforced fiberglass composite stock with an aircraft-grade aluminum bedding block running the full length of the receiver and it was fitted with a 26" free-floating, heavy-weight barrel. It was heavy enough to absorb a lot of the recoil and Remington had come out with a Managed Recoil Cartridge in .308. They got Lane a laptop computer so that they could avoid having to buy her 2 computers, a desktop now and a laptop later. Meanwhile, Janice and Ed took the kids shopping for presents for Jack and Mary. Then, they went to supper. That turned out to be a dang expensive chicken dinner.

And, the dealers didn't have the rifle, ammo or the computer in stock. That meant another trip to town, before Christmas hopefully and weather permitting. Lane had a bit more spent on her than Robbie, so Mary and Jack talked about accessories for Robbie's rifle. They could add a Harris bipod and probably a scope for the difference in the cost of the Christmas presents. Mary called the dealer and had him recommend a good scope for the rifle. She told him to install the scope and bipod as soon as the gun came in. God bless ATM cards. But, it probably meant getting another year out of the pickup.

The stuff came in three weeks before Christmas and Jack made the trip to town to pick it up. He'd asked Janice what Mary wanted for Christmas and Janice told him that Mary really wanted a new winter coat, specifically something she could work outside in. A store had The North Face brand Varius Guide jacket and pants and he bought her the set. Mary rode to town with him to pick up his present as well. Jack was one of those types of fellas that said he didn't want anything for Christmas and then looked under the tree to see if there were any packages with his name on them. Although Mary made a purchase, Jack later noticed that none of the packages had his name on them. Mary

had the problem of buying something for a man who basically had everything. The solution was simple, buy him something he always wanted but would never spend the money on. That something was a Randall Made Model 2 "Fighting Stiletto" with a 7" blade. It made the perfect gift and was totally impractical.

Christmas morning they gathered to have breakfast and open gifts. It never occurred to Jack that the packages with no names on them were his. The kids were totally practical and predictable and they bought him clothes. When he opened the package with the Randall, his face lit up as bright as the kids. Mary was equally surprised. The coat and pants were top of the line and must have set Jack back more than the knife. But, I guess when you think about it, everything set Jack back except the presents the kids bought. They'd saved the money he'd given them and spent it on Mom and Dad for Christmas. Ed and Janice got sweaters, are you surprised? The day after Christmas, it started to snow again and didn't let up for a week. The wind wasn't up so it didn't qualify as a blizzard but the snow was getting very deep. Johnny Cash had a song titled *Five Feet High and Rising*. Man, he was about 9 feet short, and it was only January.

There was something definitely out of the ordinary about these snowfalls and even Ed agreed. Ed had said it would get worse before it got better, but he had nothing like this in mind; especially for the middle of January. *Fossil evidence clearly demonstrates that Earth vs. climate can shift gears within a decade, establishing new and different patterns that can persist for decades to centuries. In addition, these climate shifts do not necessarily have universal, global effects. They can generate a counterintuitive scenario: Even as the earth as a whole continues to warm gradually, large regions may experience a precipitous and disruptive shift into colder climates.*

Now, according to the information available on the web, any such climate change would be short lived, maybe only a few decades. But, it really depends on what you believe and whom you believe. I can speak with some reasoned authority that *The Day After Tomorrow* was only a movie. But that doesn't mean that North America or Europe cannot experience an abrupt climate change. The Gulf Stream is already slowing because of the arctic melt off mentioned earlier. Read that on CNN last week folks. Now when it comes to politics, I don't believe anything the Communist News Network says, but maybe they have it right on the climate. It is sensational enough all by itself.

In my humble opinion, it will start with earlier winters and later summers and progress until the summers are so short that the only way to grow crops is to plant very short maturing varieties. If you examine that various problems that Jack and Mary have experienced since they got married, you should realize that each one of the scenarios is entirely possible in today's world. The Department of Homeland Security was created in response to 9/11. Is there still a real terrorist threat? Is there a reasonable possibility of racial problems in this country, regardless of the group or groups to whom they are directed? What are the odds that a new Democrat government will attempt to eliminate firearms ownership and what is the likely reaction of the millions of gun owners in the US? Before you dismiss the possibilities, ask yourself, "Do bears crap in the woods?"

Simply put a lot of people don't believe in getting prepared because either they don't believe that there is anything to get prepared for or that if something very bad happened no amount of preparations would see them through the situation. I don't happen to agree. Apparently, Jack doesn't agree either, because he went ahead and made those preparations. Some of it didn't cost him a lot of money because he didn't have a lot of money to spend. It isn't that hard to build a storm shelter. And if you have a house with a basement, you can devote a portion of the basement to a shelter. You probably don't need the number of guns in this story, but Paul was a gun collector.

And, while some of the weapons have suppressors, they aren't an absolute necessity. A typical suppressor costs around \$700 and that makes it an effective but darned expensive flashhider. And, there are a lot of states where you can't own a suppressor or anything that even looks like an assault rifle (legally). I wouldn't condone anyone doing anything illegal but I wouldn't go running to some LEO just because I knew someone who had an illegal assault rifle, high capacity magazines or some of the tamer things and lived right down the block. Maybe that makes me the exception to the rule in a state like California, but they don't call it The People's Republik of Kalifornia for no reason. And while I am a California native, I was raised in the Midwest.

When one thinks about all of the disasters over the past century, the most likely to occur are natural disasters of one form or another. North America is beset with tsunamis, hurricanes, tornadoes, earthquakes, floods, Pacific Winter Storms and the occasional volcanic eruption. Ever see the photos of Shoemaker-Levy 9 crashing into Jupiter? Those 'fragment's' were as big as 2km in diameter. How many near-Earth asteroids are there? The scientists have no idea and the government doesn't want to spend the money to find out. We have higher priorities in this country than protecting the planet from an asteroid. In *Deep Impact* and *Armageddon* they tried to nuke the rocks. Didn't really work all that well, did it? In *Meteor* they used 24 rockets or so, maybe 26. That didn't totally stop the meteor either. But, you're more likely to get hit by lightning than by an asteroid, or so they tell us.

And remember the fictional story about Yellowstone erupting? Yellowstone is two or three old super volcanoes that could go again. Yellowstone sits over a 'hot spot' or magma chamber and as the crust shifts, the hot spot appears to shift. And they are not small volcanoes by any stretch of the imagination. The most likely natural disaster of global consequences relates to global warming melting off the ice caps and the fresh water diluting the salinity of the North Atlantic, slowing the Gulf Stream and that could affect the weather in the US for decades. Jack and Ed were right to be worried. By the time you're into an 11-year cycle and recognize it for what it is, it is half over, but the worst is yet to come.

## The Loner – Chapter 15 – Not an 11-Year Cycle

Jack hadn't been paying attention to TV and he only occasionally went to the CNN website. On this day, however, he checked out the science page on the website and saw an article about arctic shipping. The fabled Northwest Passage was actually open during the summer months because the icecap was mostly gone. He got hooked on following links and ended up reading some of those old articles about abrupt climate changes that I mentioned in the previous chapter. Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute had the most articles of interest and he read a follow on article to the article about the North Atlantic circulation system.

According to that article, the scenario posed in the earlier paper about the abrupt climate change occurring within the next 2 decades was true. There were already too many signs to ignore, according to the author. With the melt off of the ice caps, the Thermohaline had been drastically altered and North America was in for a long period of cold, moist winters. The author went on to suggest that each year for the next 20 or so years, at a minimum, would see a shortened growing season and an extended winter.

"You won't believe what I just read on the web," Jack said.

"Let me guess, the climate is changing," Mary chuckled.

"Hey this is serious," Jack said, "That one article said that this could go on for 2 decades and maybe even a century."

"Won't be any different than living in northern Canada or Alaska," Mary suggested. "People have lived there and survived for eons."

"From the sounds of things, Mary," Jack continued, "We ought to have a two story home and live on the top story during the winter. That way the snow would only come half way up the house instead of burying it."

"We don't have any trouble around the cabin," Mary pointed out. "You just need to keep producing firewood and keep it stacked at strategic locations. In case you haven't noticed, having all of those extra stacks of firewood has kept the cabin relatively free of snow."

"You not excited about this, are you?" Jack asked.

"Why should I be?" Mary countered. "It will be like living in the Swiss Alps. We're no strangers to snow, Jack."

"This is going to put the economy in the toilet," Jack went on.

"You must have figured on that when you sold out the guide business," Mary observed. "Now that you're in the firewood business, you might become a millionaire."

“Yeah, right. At \$150 a cord, a hundred cords is only \$15 grand,” Jack said.

“If you’re right, the price of firewood will probably go up,” Mary claimed. “And if you can make \$20 thousand a year and if we grow what we need, we’ll be all right.”

“You have an answer for everything?” Jack asked.

“No. But I’m not going to sit around and feel sorry about something that I have no control over,” Mary replied. “And Lane and Robbie are getting big enough to be a real help, even gathering the wood. Pay them a wage or a share of the profits and they’ll be more than happy to help. If Ed and Mom will do the garden this coming summer, I’ll even pitch in and help.”

You see, people don’t always fight, but they do have what one might call ‘intense discussions’. It seemed obvious to Jack that if they were going to experience heavier winters for the next few years, he needed to change a few things around the place. The radio tower and wind turbine were high enough off the ground that he didn’t need to do anything with them. That trellis to the shelter had worked out just fine, too. But Mary’s comment about the firewood keeping the snow away from the cabin got him to thinking about snow fence. If he added snow fence in the appropriate places, he could keep both the cabin and the woodpiles free of snow. That might eliminate the need for him to move the Snow Cat on a daily basis every time it snowed, too.

Jack started to surf the web looking for snow fencing. What he had in mind was the Aspen slat and wire fence, but what he saw was plastic fence in bright orange colors. Oh, they still made the Aspen slat fencing, but the plastic stuff was much more affordable. He was thinking about how high he should make the fence, but the installation instructions talked about multiple rows of fencing spaced 25 fence heights apart. He bookmarked the websites for future reference and went looking for chainsaws and used hydraulic splitters. He sort of figured that Robbie and he could work in the woods and Mary and Lane could handle the splitting and stacking.

With the prevailing wind out of the west, Jack could probably get by with 2 layers of snow fencing, or so he figured, on the west side of the property. It looked to him like he could get by with a four 100’ rolls and maybe 50 posts. At \$70 a roll, the fencing wasn’t too expensive, but those darn posts were \$6.50 each. Don’t forget the tie wraps, Jack; you need a few bags of those, too. And a post driver and time away from your wood harvesting. That’s all right; you have all summer, work all day and put in a few posts each night. And, you can always raise your price to \$165 per cord to allow for delivering full cords and transportation. Nobody will get too upset with a 10% price increase; they’ll just think that they went to the grocery store.

Spring came later than the previous year and Jack was hard pressed to get into the woods. He ordered the snow fencing and posts and such and bought a used chainsaw for Robbie. Where had that little kid gone who wanted to know about God and such?

Robbie and Lane were big kids now, really a very young man and woman. Since they couldn't get into the woods to harvest timber, Robbie and he put in 2 200' rows of snow fencing 125' apart. They used a cedar post on both ends and the metal posts spaced 8' apart in between. Nice fence, stretched tight and done by the time he could get into the forest.

They carried rifles in the pickup just in case of the occasional bear or mountain lion, though they didn't see too many of the former and none of the latter. With Robbie trimming the dead falls and Jack cutting the pieces to 16" lengths, it went much faster. It was time for Robbie to learn to drive that pickup because it took Jack a lot longer to cut the logs than for Robbie to trim them. So, Jack gave Robbie a few driving lessons which would result in saving them a lot of time. It was working out well and they were harvesting almost 3 cords a day. They put an ad in the paper and offered firewood for \$150 a cord picked up or \$165 a cord delivered but not stacked. Delivered and stacked was \$175 a cord because stacking took a lot of time. Those folks that wanted the wood delivered were told that it would be possible as early as September and those folks who wanted to pick it up were told to come now.

The four of them only took Sundays off. They needed to get to church and have a day of rest. Harvesting firewood is a lot harder than guiding some city folks looking for a deer or elk. They ended up having about 75 workdays during June, July and August and had firewood stacked to the heavens. On days when they couldn't get into the forest because of rain, they delivered those firewood orders. The decision about how to compensate the kids came easily. They were working like adults and deserved to be treated like adults so they divided the profits 4 ways after taking out for expenses. When they stopped for the season they began to deliver the firewood orders, working from dawn to dusk. Mary stayed home and let Jack and the kids handle the deliveries.

When it was all said and done, they had sold 250 cords of wood at an average price of \$165 a cord. Expenses amounted to about \$15 a cord, leaving them a neat \$37,500 to split 4 ways. So much for Jack becoming a millionaire! And winter blew in around the middle of September. They had been so busy trying to get those last orders delivered that they hadn't even stopped to celebrate the kids' 13th birthdays on August 12, 2016. But, they made up for it and the kids were beyond happy when they each received a check for \$9,375. These 2 kids were going to college that much was sure and they'd pay for their own education.

If you stop and think about it, when you work from dawn to dusk during the summer and get snowed in for most of the winter, there aren't many opportunities to spend money. The \$18,750 that Jack and Mary realized from their summer's labor was more than enough to see them through the winter. The only time the generator ran was when it kicked on and exercised itself, so refilling the 5,000-gallon tank and adding more PRI-D wasn't that expensive. The only major expense that they had was when Jack replaced that 300-gallon diesel tank with a 1,000-gallon diesel tank and raised it to 15' (top of the tank) off the ground. They moved the old 300-gallon tank down to Janice and Ed's. The

deliveryman wasn't too happy about having to climb that ladder to fill the tank, but stuff happens.

The first few snowfalls weren't so bad that they couldn't continue to gather timber and lay in firewood. So, Mary decided to delay the kids' lessons until they were snowed in. They managed to harvest, stack and spit another 70 cords of firewood. Jack had also picked up a sled that he could pull with the Snow Cat. It would hold about 250 cubic feet of firewood. Those late season deliveries cost more, \$200 a cord, because the Snow Cat wasn't the cheapest way to deliver firewood. Then again, it gave him one hell of a leg up on his competition because he could deliver firewood year round. And whenever they got an order, they all went to Meeker and went shopping.

They say that, 'all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy'. Nah, not when you're married to someone who looks like Kathy Ireland. Let me give you a hint about something, too. I wouldn't challenge any one of the four of them to a fistfight; these people were in the best physical condition of their lives. Now, Jack didn't ski and Mary decided that he needed to learn. There is Alpine skiing, Backcountry skiing, and Cross-country skiing, just to name a few. Alpine skiing evolved from cross-county when ski lift infrastructure was developed at mountain resorts to tow skiers back to the top of slopes, thus making it possible to repeatedly enjoy skiing down steep, long slopes that would be otherwise too tiring to climb up. Backcountry or "off-piste" is skiing in a sparsely inhabited rural region.

Backcountry mountains usually consist of hard to reach locations where conventional means to climb up the mountains are not present, such as ski lifts, cable cars, etc. Backcountry skiing can be accomplished by snow cats, snowmobiles, snowshoes, ski or snowboard boots, and skins. Once the peak is reached or any other location on the mountains seems ski-able your decent may begin. Cross-country skiing has been practiced in Scandinavian countries since prehistoric times, and also possibly by Native Americans for similar lengths of time. It has been used by polar explorers as a means of transport, and all Scandinavian armies train their infantry on skis for winter operations.

Mary taught Jack the fundamentals of getting around on skis and concentrated on cross-country skiing because that was most suitable to their circumstances. Naturally, the kids wanted to ski too and Jack told them to take some of their millions and buy whatever equipment they wanted, he was more than willing to provide transportation to town. You see, there is a downside to working for a living, when you have your own money, maybe your parents will make you spend some of it on things for yourself. Maybe you'd rather work for free and have them buy you what they think you need?

Near the top of the communications tower was a satellite dish. That was \$60 a month but the dish served both households. Television reception on the system is highly reliable year-round and nationwide. During heavy rain or snowfall, however, some satellite customers may experience a temporary loss of picture quality. This phenomenon also can occur if the dish or low noise block converter (LNB) accumulates too much wet snow. When snow accumulates on the dish, the service is not lost but the strength of

the signal can be weakened by the snow's water content. This "signal fall-off" occurs when water content is at its highest. During colder winter months, when snow is drier, dishes usually do not experience such problems, even if there is substantial snow buildup. By 2015 when they'd switched from TV antennas to the dish, the technology existed to prevent the problem with wet snow. The dishes could be heated and were coated to allow the moisture to slide right off. Still, during a blizzard when the wind was blowing hard enough, that communications mast whipped a little and reduced the quality of their picture. The dish gave them internet and was their connection with the outside world.

And the kids were teenagers now and needed social skills. Since they couldn't go to school, church served as their introduction to other people their own age. That has its upside; at least you know you have some common interests. I might point out that religious differences aren't the number one cause of marriages not working out. That honor goes to money or the lack thereof. And, the kids spent all of the time they could in the stores 'shopping'. Were they shopping for goods and services or just new companions? Maybe a little of both, they generally only got to town on Sundays and when there was a firewood order to deliver. Junior was showing his age. The average life of a German Shepherd is 12-13 years and Junior had arthritis. It slowed him down, but didn't stop him.

I can remember a movie called *The Long Hot Summer*, but I don't remember seeing *The Long Cold Winter*. I would have if they'd have made it. That was a perfect description of the winter of 2016-2017. They got a lot of snow and the temperatures set new lows. If Jack hadn't added the optional blower to that Franklin stove they would have gotten pretty cold. But, between the wood stove in the kitchen and that blower, the cabin was just comfortable. And, when it wasn't snowing, they went skiing or just played in the snow. Although Mary's degree was in Elementary Education, she was well rounded and could keep up with the kids' lessons. Jack filled in on the History part, her weakest subject. In public schools, teachers gloss over parts of the books, probably due to time pressures. In home schooling, you never knew what that teacher in town was doing, so you just did all of the books, cover-to-cover.

You may have noticed that we sort of overlooked politics for a while. In 2016, the Republicans came back into their own. Eight years of either political party was about all that most people could stand. They slightly improved their majorities in the House and the Senate, but not enough to control anything. A Republican was elected President and he had promised to sign the Kyoto Accord. President Bush gambled that withdrawing from the negotiations – that is, removing the indispensable polluter – would force the international community back to the drawing board to seek an agreement more favorable to the US's gas-guzzling economy. Now in 2000, Bush had promised to sign the thing, but check your history, never happened.

I am not an environmentalist, but things like wind and solar generated electricity do make sense. Burning low sulfur coal to generate electricity is a step in the right direction, it eliminates acid rain, but the US generates 36% of the Carbon Dioxide in the



world today. And, I would favor nuclear power generation but it has as many or maybe more downsides than other sources of energy. Let's see if the Republican President elected in 2016 does any better than Bush about keeping his promise to support the Kyoto Accord. This would be a good thing; the horse is only a mile away, so hurry up and close the barn door. The Democrat President had finally signed the accord shortly after taking office in 2009. But, these things take time to implement and are expensive.

*The Man Who Saw Tomorrow* (1981) was a documentary utilizing a grab bag of dramatized scenes, stock footage, TV news clips and interviews to ask: Did 16th century French astrologer and physician Nostradamus correctly predict such events as the fall of King Louis XVI, the rise of Napoleon, the assassination of President John F. Kennedy? And are there prophecies that have yet to come true? It sure in the hell wasn't George W. Bush. Should you have signed that accord, George, it's dang cold here in Colorado. Snow is pretty deep, too, come to think of it. Which quatrain covers this event? I'm sure that some true believer can find one.

Mary had it right, anyway. This wasn't the end of time, just a change in seasons. Earlier I mentioned the Buford/Newcastle Road. It is the Buford-New Castle road, #17 and it goes south from Buford. Jack and Mary live on state road #8 west of Buford. County Road 8 is paved to a point just east of Buford, another fact I got wrong. That must be why the County started to clear the road in the winter. However, it was still at the bottom of the list, highway 13 came first. (That little fact took 2 hours of searching to find. Try it; it's not easy to write about someplace you've never been.) Now, that didn't mean they didn't need the Snow Cat to get to town, sometimes they could take the pickup. Sometimes. And, sometimes they couldn't get to Meeker at all because of the weather.

Maybe the snow is a little heavier and the summer a little shorter and the winter a little longer, what's the problem? Not much really, that just makes the heating season longer for those folks up north and puts a little frost on those citrus fruits down south. Citrus doesn't do well with frost? Well, I'll be darned. Can't grow quite as much food to feed the nation because of the shortened growing season? Marie Antoinette said, "Let them eat cake." (Not true by the way.) Is the price of food going up in the grocery store? It was the same in 2004; got so you couldn't afford hamburger. Something about some crazy cow or something, no wait, that was an angry cow. I can't remember; all I can remember was that the cow was mad as hell. Came from Canada and didn't like it in the lower 48 or so I heard. Come to think of it, back in 2004, the price of beef got so high that there was a resurgence of rustling. Matt Dillon was never around when you needed him.

## The Loner – Chapter 16 – Swiss Alps?

That's what the Lady said, 'Swiss Alps'. And I called that stove a Franklin stove, didn't I? It really wasn't a Franklin stove and it was 63% efficient. Not perfect, but not bad. The dual blowers were standard too, not an option. Give an old man a break, what I said was, the fireplace had an insert installed. People sometimes call these Franklin Stoves. Jack should have bought it from Regency, they are more efficient, running 70% and higher. The blowers were optional on the Regency, that's what got me confused.

The country around there was pretty flat in places so it wasn't really the Swiss Alps. Right down the road a piece was something they called Flat-Tops Wilderness. In the 1940's the spruce bark beetle infested the Engelmann spruce on the Flat Tops. Uncontrolled, the resulting epidemic left 68,000 acres of spruce devastated. Today a silver sun bleached "ghost" forest of dead snags stands in memory of the appetite of the bark beetle. Now, I wonder who was clearing out all of those dead trees and selling the firewood? Jack did, too; it would have made getting firewood a whole lot easier.

Say Jack, have you met Murphy? He's an interesting guy. You have to forgive him, he's a little eccentric, but you really should give him a try. He's dependable I can give you that; he turns up when you least expect him, and always brings you a surprise. Going to cut wood this year? Better get the saws serviced and buy extra oil and chains. Now Murphy always plays by the rules, just so you know. What rules? Why his own of course, want to read them. Do those saws have kickback systems? Personally, I like Stihl chainsaws because they've been around so long. Stihl recommends the use of green reduced kickback bars and green low kickback chains on all Stihl chainsaws, they've heard all about Murphy. Besides, all you're doing is clearing downed timber, what could go wrong?

That snow fence worked like a charm. There were huge mounds of snow behind both of the fences, and the snow around the cabin was manageable. Some days were clear and they could get outside. Darn it was cold, though. The thermometer only went to minus 50 and the needle was hovering down at minus 34. Well now, temperatures that low hadn't been recorded in, well almost forever. The average temperature for Meeker in December and January was more like 20 degrees above zero (F). The bad news was that it was more like Alaska than Colorado and the good news was there wasn't any more bad news. With both snow fences full, Jack thought that maybe he should add a third. Might as well, it was going to be a very late spring.

That very late spring was going to cut into the amount of time that they had to harvest firewood. What they really needed was a vehicle to haul the wood from the forest to a cabin and another to make deliveries. That way they could continue working in the forest right up until the first snowfall and maybe beyond. Already people were calling about orders for next year and a lot of those people were talking about getting 2 cords because they were running low. Jack realized that there was no way he could double his output so he offered to sell them part of a cord to get them through to spring and a cord and a half the following fall.

When Janice heard of their need for an additional truck to make deliveries, she offered the use of her GMC. It was a long-bed with a bed liner and she didn't figure it would get too dinged up delivering the firewood. She told Jack to order her 6 of the 100' rolls of snow fence and enough posts to put it all up. Ed could handle the post driver and maybe they could give him a hand stringing the fence. Jack sort of thought that there were only 24 hours in a day, but with Janice offering them the use of her pickup, how could he refuse? Besides, they hadn't been able to get into the forest the previous year and had used that time to string the fence. Every cloud has a silver lining, Janice paid for all of the fencing and posts.

The minute the weather and ground permitted, they were out putting in the fences. They had twice as much fencing to put in this year, a total of 800', and they ended up with the 5 of them, Ed, Mary and the kids working on the project. Ed offered to pitch in and help with the delivery operation and Jack was hoping for a total harvest of 350 cords of firewood. He had his regular customers and some folks who just came to him because their regular guy couldn't deliver. Frankly, he didn't see how it was humanly possible to harvest his goal of 350 cords anyway. A 16" long log that was 16" in diameter equaled about 1.8 cubic feet of wood. That meant that a cord of wood was about 71 of those logs. Doing those late year deliveries and then the part cord deliveries had wiped out their reserve of firewood.

Janice had been going to offer to skip the garden and help with the firewood until she saw the prices in the grocery store in Meeker. You didn't have to be a math major to realize that you had no choice except to grow as much of your own food as possible. And, with beef and pork reaching record prices, they were going to be eating a lot of game this year. It was just as well, Janice could wear gloves to garden, but even with gloves, she was sure to break a nail handling the firewood.

After the fence was in, it was dry enough to start on their wood harvest. The grizzly bear is the largest of North American terrestrial carnivores. Once they occurred throughout Colorado, and they apparently were fairly common in the western three-fifths of the state at least until the turn of the century. After 1900 populations declined rapidly, No grizzly was killed in the state from 1952 until 1979, when naturalists were surprised to learn that a grizzly was killed by a hunting guide in the San Juan Mountains, apparently in self-defense. The grizzly bear is classified as an endangered species in Colorado, but it probably is gone from the state. Some have argued that because grizzly bears are native to Colorado's wild lands they should be re-established here, but the Colorado Wildlife Commission is on record as opposing restoration.

Hey, Colorado Wildlife Commission, I have news for you. They're back!!! Moose have wandered into Colorado on occasions since European settlement. Although native, there was no significant breeding population until a dozen animals from Utah were reintroduced to North Park in 1978, followed by another dozen from Wyoming in 1979. The population has expanded, and animals now have moved into adjacent Larimer and Grand counties. They also have been introduced in Southwest Colorado. Moose are the

largest of deer, bulls ranging to 9½ feet long (of which just 4 inches is tail), and 6 feet tall at the shoulder. They weigh over 1,000 pounds. Flattened antlers, a peculiar drooping upper lip and a prominent "bell" or dewlap on the throat make them unmistakable. Moose are semi-aquatic, often feeding on aquatic plants and willows in summer. In winter they may turn to grazing and thus compete with native wildlife and domestic livestock.

Black bears are animals of central and western Colorado, from the foothills across the mountains to the high mesas of the Western Slope. Typical habitat is forest, woodland or brush. It makes little sense for any mammal the size of a bear to be a picky eater. Black bears are omnivores, eating about anything in good supply: carrion, fruit, nuts, honey (bees, waxy comb and all), young deer and elk, birds, eggs, insects. Bears have no enemies other than humans. The wapiti, or elk, is the largest of Colorado's native deer (7 – 9 feet long, with a 4- to 6-inch tail, and weighing 450 – 900 pounds).

Commonly called "elk" in this country, wapiti is a preferred name because elsewhere in the world "elk" refers to the animal we call moose. Our wapiti is a Holarctic species, which means it occurs in both North America and Eurasia, and in Eurasia it is known as the red deer. Whatever we choose to call it, this is an impressive and important animal in Colorado. The wapiti is brownish tan in color, with a yellowish rump and a dark mane on the shoulders. Mature males have large antlers, typically with six tines branching from each beam.

The mountain lion is called by more names than any other Colorado mammal – cougar, puma, panther, catamount or just plain lion – and all connote respect for a magnificent hunter. Colorado's largest cat, adult lions are more than 6 feet long, with a graceful, black-tipped tail 32 inches long. They weigh 130 pounds or more. Color is reddish to buffy, paler below.

Cougars have the largest geographic range of any native American mammal other than humans – from western Canada to Argentina. Once they ranged from coast to coast in the United States, but today eastern populations are extinct or endangered. The West is their stronghold, and in Colorado they are most abundant in foothills, canyons or mesa country. They are more at home in brushy areas and woodlands than in forests or open prairies.

Active year round, the lion's staple diet is deer. Adults maintain their condition by eating a deer a week. The deer is often killed cleanly with a broken neck. The cat gorges on the carcass until it can eat no more, covers the remainder with leaves or conifer needles, then fasts for a few days, digesting and resting.

Not only were the grizzly bears back, most of the carnivores were pretty danged hungry after a winter like that. Some gun collectors have a variety of weapons and others, like Paul, are particularly fond of one brand. His collection included 3 of the Winchester, model 70 Safari Express rifles, one each in .375 H&H, .416 Rem. Mag. and .458 Win. Mag. There is an African outfitter living in the Meeker area (really) and one of the gun

stores stocked ammo for the guy. The outfitter was dead and the gun store gave Jack one hell of a price on their remaining supplies, just to get rid of it. It was mostly .375 H&H anyway.

“Jack, how about I get myself a chain saw and work in the forest with Robbie and you to begin with?” Ed suggested. “I can sure as hell cut the wood for Janice and me and that will get us a step up on the wood to split. It’s been a while, but I can run a chainsaw as well as the next guy.”

“I don’t know Ed, that might get Janice’s pretty GMC all scratched up,” Jack countered.

“She’ll get over it,” Ed laughed.

“TV says that there are grizzly bears back in the area,” Jack added. “Now it doesn’t matter what caliber of rifle you have if you don’t place the shot well, but I think maybe I’ll drag along Paul’s .375 H&H for added insurance. I’m just not positive that I can put down a grizz with a .308 if push comes to shove.”

“Bears have never been much of a problem around here,” Ed disagreed.

“Pretty tough winter, Ed,” Jack suggested. “They could be mighty hungry and not in the mood to discuss it.”

“It would be nice to have a bearskin rug to put in front of the firebox,” Ed chuckled.

“If it’s all the same to you, I’ll only kill one if I have to,” Jack replied.

With the three of them cutting up downfalls and using 2 pickups to haul, they started to accumulate a huge pile of logs for Mary and Lane to split. Mary had put off starting splitting, instead helping her Mom with the garden. When it was rototilled and raked, Mary and Lane started in on the timber. They were already 2 weeks behind the men and it took them another 3 weeks to catch up. Then, 5 weeks into the timber operation, Ed switched to delivering the firewood. This year, it was \$175 a cord picked up, \$200 a cord delivered and \$225 a cord delivered and stacked. Most folks just wanted it delivered which suited Ed; he didn’t really want to stack it anyway.

Jack got his grizzlies, two as a matter of fact. The first one was a sow with 2 cubs who wouldn’t back down and charged. Jack put her down with the .375 but felt sorry for the cubs. He loaded them up and hauled them home and called the Department of Wildlife. Normally, Junior would have been along and given warning, but Junior wasn’t up to it any more. And they left Shep home to guard the women, just in case. The following Sunday, they ran into someone in church who had some German Shepherd pups they were trying to give away. One thing led to another and they ended up going home with a new dog that day. They decided to call him Ranger.

The pup wouldn't do them much good in the forest and Jack decided that Junior was going to have to just come along anyway. That was a fateful decision as it turned out. It was right around the twins' birthdays when Junior let out a growl warning Jack that there was danger afoot. You'll have to give Junior credit, he tried to stop that bear. But, he was old and slow and one slap with those giant paws took Junior down. It did give Jack enough time to grab the .375 and kill the bear. Junior wasn't dead, but he was broke up something awful. Jack rushed him to the vet in town, but there was nothing the vet could do for Junior. He died right there on the table before the vet could put him down.

They took the rest of that day off. First they buried Junior under a tree and put up a marker. Then they skinned the bear, which Robbie had hauled back to the cabin and gutted. It looked like they would have plenty of bear meat to eat this winter. The only danger in eating bear meat was the danger of Trichinosis. It's no problem if you thoroughly cook the meat. They hung the bear in the shed to age, just like the first one. That was the last they saw of bears that season.

Those 5-6 weeks Ed had spent in the woods helping them cut up the logs really made a difference. So did having 2 pickups to use. And Jack bought a trailer that held as much firewood as his sled, 250 cubic feet. That way, Ed could make two trips to town a day and deliver 3 cords of wood at a time. It was pretty hard work for a man in his 60's but Ed was fit and getting a whole lot fitter. Janice remarked that it was about time he got rid of his paunch. Ed wasn't anybody's fool. Anytime he could get the buyer to help him unload the firewood, he did that very thing. It just made sense anyway, the people were going to have to move the wood and stack it.

Towards the end of the harvesting season, Jack and Robbie just cut the wood and piled it. They could get more accomplished that way and when Ed wasn't busy delivering, he could haul it back to the cabin. There was the risk that someone could come along and help themselves to the piled up logs, but hey, Jack was shooting for 350 cords this year. Perhaps because of Ed's help or perhaps because they just piled the wood, they made their goal and then some. Dang, that's a lot of wood. A 40' semi-trailer holds just under 3,100 cubic feet or about 24 cords of wood if you could pack it that tight. That's just to give you an idea how much wood 350 cords equals, 350 divided by 24 equals 14.5. Dang, that's a lot of wood. Jack ended up selling 350 cords at an average of \$200 per cord. That was \$70,000 worth of wood. Divided 5 ways, this year, not 4, that came out to \$14,000 a head, gross. Did you say Harvard University? But, expenses were up to \$20 a cord and it only worked out to be about \$12,600 apiece. Not bad for a season's work, even if you had to use the Snow Cat to haul in the last of the logs.

I expect that means that they must have actually harvested 400 cords of wood because they kept 25 cords apiece for themselves. Getting those last loads of wood in and split was a terrible chore because 5' high and rising only described the first storm of the winter. It was pretty darned cold work, too. Mary had Robbie and Lane working on their lessons and Jack was left to split and stack the wood. At least Ed hauled his own wood home and then came back help him stack his. Say, did I mention that there are Wolver-

ines, Lynx and Bobcats in Colorado? They hadn't had problems with any of those critters and if it never happened that would be soon enough.

"What do you want for Christmas this year?" Mary asked Jack.

"How about to sleep in for a couple of months?" Jack replied. "I can't remember being this tired."

"I downloaded some recipes from the net for cooking bear," Mary said. "They claim that it tastes like pork."

"Not chicken?" Jack laughed.

"Jack, the only thing that tastes like chicken is chicken," Mary laughed. "I don't care what 'they' claim."

"We ought to start raising some chickens with the price of meat these days," Jack suggested. "Even eggs are up to \$3 a dozen."

"It's okay with me, but you're going to have to build a coop or a henhouse," Mary agreed.

"Do you think it is a bad idea?" Jack asked. "It gets pretty cold out these days."

"I did some research," Mary answered.

A common question from small backyard laying flock owners is "Why have my hens stopped laying?" There are many factors which can cause hens to stop laying and in many cases there are multiple causes which add up to few or no eggs. The most common causes of decreased egg production include: decreasing day length, improper nutrition, disease, advancing age and stress.

#### A. Decreasing day length or insufficient day length

Hens require 14 hours of day length to sustain egg production. Once day length drops below 12 hours, production will decrease and frequently stop. This happens naturally from October through February. To prevent this, provide artificial light to maintain a constant day length of at least 14 hours per day. One 40-watt light for each 100 square feet of coop is adequate. The lights should be added in the morning hours so the birds can go to roost as the sunsets. This prevents birds from being stranded in the dark when lights are turned out during dark hours.

Some small flock owners find it easier to leave the lights on continuously. This is not a problem as long as you do not use light bulbs over the 40-watt size. However, the time clock will help lower your electric bill.

## B. Improper nutrition

Layers require a completely balanced ration to sustain maximum egg production over time. Improper nutrition can occasionally cause hens to stop laying.

The most common problem is failing to provide a constant source of fresh water. This is especially a problem during the coldest months when the water can freeze. Provide adequate water equipment so the birds always have fresh water.

Inadequate levels of energy, protein or calcium can also cause a production decrease. This is why it is so important to supply your laying hens with a constant supply of nutritionally balanced layer food balanced at 16% - 18% protein. Feeding whole grains, scratch feeds and table scraps will cause the birds diet to become improperly balanced.

Many times these imbalances can cause other problems like prolapse (egg blow-outs). Prolapse is caused when the bird is too fat and/or egg is too large and the bird's reproductive tract is expelled with the egg. Prolapse usually cause permanent damage to the hen and is fatal in many cases.

Feeding oyster shell "free choice" (always available) is also a good idea to help insure strong eggshells.

## C. Disease

Disease problems can occur under the best of conditions. Often one of the first signs of disease is a drop in egg production. Other symptoms of disease include dull and listless appearance, watery eyes and nostrils, coughing, molting, lameness and mortality in the flock. Remember some death is normal over the period of a year in any flock. However, if you suspect a disease, contact a skilled veterinarian for help in examining your flock and get an accurately diagnosis and treatment.

Your best protection against disease is to buy healthy stock and keep them isolated from other birds. Buying adult poultry and introducing them to your flock is asking for trouble. If you wish to increase your flock, buy chicks from a reputable hatchery or hatch some of your own eggs. Adult birds can look healthy and carry diseases.

## D. Aging Hens

Production hens can lay efficiently for two laying cycles. However, after two or three years, many hens decline in productivity. This varies greatly from bird to bird. Good layers will lay about 50 to 60 weeks per laying cycle. Between these cycles they will be interrupted by a rest period called a molt. Poorer layers and older hens will molt more often and lay less. Removal of non-layers is recommended if economical egg production is your goal.

## E. Stress



Any stress such as moving, handling, changes in environmental conditions or fright can contribute to or be the main cause for egg production declines. Common stresses include:

1. Chilling. Chickens do not handle damp, drafty conditions well. Prevent excessive exposure to wet, drafty conditions during colder months.
2. Handling or moving. Once the laying flock is in place, limit any unnecessary moving or handling. Switching roosters or changing the pens population will also disrupt the pens pecking order and cause some temporary social stress in your flock.
3. Parasites. If external or internal parasites are present, get proper diagnosis and treatment.
4. Fright. Limit the movement of children, dogs, livestock and vehicles around your flock as well as loud noises to prevent frightening the hens.
5. Predators also can stress the birds and create a decrease in production.

F. Other problems to consider when you see a decrease in egg collection:

1. Predators and snakes consuming the eggs.
2. Egg-eating by hens in the flock.
3. Excessive egg breakage.
4. Hens hiding the eggs when able to run free.

## The Loner – Chapter 17 – Chickens

Mary had done some other research too.

Preserving Eggs for Winter Use:

For every three gallons of water, put in 1 pint of fresh slacked lime, and common salt,  $\frac{1}{2}$  pt; mix well, and let the barrel be about half full of this fluid, then with a dish let down your fresh eggs into it, tipping the dish after it fills with water so they roll out without cracking the shell, for if the shell is cracked the egg will spoil.

If fresh eggs are put in, fresh eggs will come out, as I have seen men who have kept them two, and even four, years, at sea. A piece of board may be laid across the top of the eggs, and a little lime and salt kept upon it, which keeps keep the fluid as strong at the top as at the bottom. This will not fail you. They must always be kept covered with the brine. Families in towns and cities by this plan can have eggs for winter use at summer prices.

First of all, the eggs you choose to preserve must be of the very best quality, 2-3 hours old and allowed to cool. If they are dirty, brush them clean. Do not wash them as it destroys the natural film on the shell. Do not attempt to store any cracked eggs. If possible, candle the eggs to choose the best.

Another way to preserve fresh eggs is to store them in a sodium silicate (waterglass) solution. When fresh eggs are immersed in it, bacteria which cause the eggs to spoil are kept out and water is kept in. Eggs can be kept fresh using this method for up to five months. When boiling eggs preserved this way, it is well advised to pin-prick the egg to allow steam to escape because the shell is no longer porous.

Walton Feed had some advice, too:

Method 1: Mineral oil, the thinnest available, warm the oil so it is as warm as your hands can work comfortably. To apply the oil, dip clean cloth in it and wipe the egg so that every bit of the shell has been coated. Now just place the eggs (small side down) in egg crates and store in a cool place. If egg crates are unavailable they do very well packed in wheat. It is important to pack the small ends down. Just alternate a layer of wheat and a layer of eggs. The eggs should keep at least 6-8 months.

Method 2: Eggs in lime water; the lime water has to be prepared first as it has to stand for a while.

To make the solution, measure 5 gallons of water and bring it to a boil. Remove from heat then add two pounds of fresh lime or dehydrated lime, and stir this almost constantly as the water cools. Dissolve as much lime as possible.

Now set the mixture aside and let stand, undisturbed, until all the un-dissolved lime has settled to the bottom and only clear liquid remains on top. It is only this clear liquid, which is to be used...

The crock, which you will be using, should be very clean. Siphon the clear liquid into the crock you will be using, taking much care not to disturb the sediment on the bottom, now pack the eggs as closely as possible into the crock in the lime solution. Be sure that all the eggs are immersed.

If the crock does not have a tight fitting lid, cover the surface of the solution with melted paraffin. This is to prevent the liquid from evaporating. Store in a cool place.

Chickens made perfect sense to Jack, but he'd have to light, insulate and heat the hen-house he built. Egg production begins when the birds reach about 18-22 weeks of age, depending on the breed and season. Flock production rises sharply and reaches a peak of about 90%, 6-8 weeks later. Production then gradually declines to about 65% after 12 months of lay. Why can't life be simple? You buy some chicks, produce eggs for a year and then butcher them. But, all you get is stewing hens, not fryers. You can bake them, of course, but most folks like fried chicken.

The chicken is a descendant of the Southeast Asian red jungle fowl first domesticated in India around 2000 BC. Most of the birds raised for meat in America today are from the Cornish (a British breed) and the White Rock (a breed developed in New England). Broiler-fryers, roasters, stewing/baking hens, capons and Rock Cornish hens are all chickens. The following are definitions for these:

Broiler-fryer - a young, tender chicken about 7 weeks old, which weighs 2½ to 4½ pounds when eviscerated. Cook by any method.

Rock Cornish Game Hen- a small broiler-fryer weighing between 1 and 2 pounds. Usually stuffed and roasted whole.

Roaster - an older chicken about 3 to 5 months old, which weighs 5 to 7 pounds. It yields more meat per pound than a broiler-fryer. Usually roasted whole.

Capon - Male chickens about 16 weeks to 8 months old, which are surgically unsexed. They weigh about 4 to 7 pounds and have generous quantities of tender, light meat. Usually roasted.

Stewing/Baking Hen - a mature laying hen 10 months to 1½ years old. Since the meat is less tender than young chickens, it's best used in moist cooking such as stewing.

Cock or rooster - a mature male chicken with coarse skin and tough, dark meat. Requires long, moist cooking.

So, you buy a bunch of pullets, let's say 100. You can keep a couple of dozen over the winter to produce eggs and then butcher them in the spring for stewing hens. You don't need such a big henhouse, maybe a coop will do. That gives you a chicken every other week for those old folks and 2 chickens every other week for the young folks. But hey, why not have chicken once a week? You end up with 180 chickens and that's a lot of plucking. You know that they sell broilers and layers, right? And, since you can't afford beef because it costs too much and you don't buy pork because bear tastes like pork, you buy chicken in the store this year and grow chickens next year. To supplement, you get a deer or two or maybe an Elk.

And, when you're in town buying materials for that chicken coop, don't forget to buy some fencing. You had better get some of that snow fencing, it's cheap enough. And, don't forget the posts and tie wraps. You couldn't afford to do it if chicken wasn't \$5 a pound. You think you're tired now Jack, you just wait until this time next year. But wait, I have an idea, buy some snow fence and connect those snow fences you already have and you'll have an instant fenced in area for the broilers. It's no biggie to take down that fence come winter after the chickens are butchered if you need to. And, maybe you won't have to and you'll get dual use out of that snow fence.

It turned out to be easier just to buy a pre-built shed to use as a chicken coop. A few rolls of insulation and a couple of light bulbs took a few hours to install. A little electric space heater went in to keep the coop warm during the winter. 250' of snow fence went much faster than 800' and they were ready to get to the woods before the woods were ready for them. It had been one nasty winter, worse than the previous year and the National Weather Service and the Old Farmer's Almanac said next year would be worse. 2018 was the year they started those chickens. Sat the coop right near where the trellis opened to the shelter so it wouldn't be a bother to fetch the eggs. Bought 2 feeder hogs, too, because he had some left over fence. Ideally, a hog should reach market weight in 160 to 180 days. Market weight is anywhere from 200-275 pounds.

"I'm tired," Jack said.

"Tired?" Mary replied. "Jack you haven't even been to the woods yet."

"I know, but I get tired just thinking about it," he laughed.

"Your wrangler went out of business at the end of the season last year," Mary reminded him. "Count your blessings."

"With us growing most of our food, I think that I'm going to cut back on the amount of firewood we harvest," Jack suggested. "The price is going up by \$25 a cord so we can cut our production by the same amount (8%) and produce the same income."

"Has oil peaked? Go ask Mother Nature."

Prices shot to record highs above \$155 a barrel this year in response to threats of terrorism, hurricanes in Florida and political unrest in Nigeria, Venezuela and elsewhere. Winter weather in the US could be the key to where crude oil goes next, some analysts said Wednesday.

"That's because heating oil is in short supply in this country. If this winter is especially cold in the East and the Midwest, the price of heating oil could rise sharply – dragging the price of crude oil with it," these analysts said.

"In fact, nervous traders sent crude prices up Wednesday in response to a 4.5% surge in heating oil prices on commodities markets."

"Dad, we're not going to be able to cut as much wood this year," Robbie announced.

"Why's that Rob?" Jack asked.

"Because I've been out checking and there isn't as much deadfall to harvest," Robbie explained. "I think some of those folks from town have been getting their own firewood."

"I was planning on cutting production down to 300 retail cords this year, and 50 for us," Jack said, "Is there enough deadfall for that?"

"Yeah, but we're going to have to get a permit for a second area," Robbie said.

"Is there enough wood in the second area for us to get all 350 cords?" Jack asked.

"I think so, why?" Robbie asked.

"Well, the National Forest Service has a forest plan and I'm not sure how many tracts we can log," Jack explained. "Deadfalls are a part of their plan and we can't just strip one area and move to another. I'll check with them and see where we can harvest this year."

"Maybe they'll let us work that burned off area," Robbie suggested.

"I don't want to get into felling trees, Rob, it's too dangerous," Jack replied.

"Speaking of dangerous," Robbie said, "Would it be ok if I got a holster and carried that Super Blackhawk Ruger revolver?"

"Think we're going to run into more Grizz?" Jack asked.

"I don't know Dad, but if Junior hadn't bothered that bear last year, you'd have never gotten to the rifle in time," Robbie reflected.

"We going to take Shep or Ranger with us this year?" Jack asked.

“We’d better take Shep, Ranger needs another year of seasoning,” Robbie suggested. “Shep is 7 so he hasn’t lost his edge and he isn’t stupid enough to try and take a bear out. I didn’t mean that the way it sounded if you’re thinking I was calling Junior stupid.”

“I understand Rob,” Jack said.

“Lane is kinda sweet on that guy at church,” Robbie said.

“Already?” Jack groaned. “You kids won’t be 15 until August, I sort of hoped you’d hold off a while on the boy-girl thing.”

“It’s not like that Dad, she just likes him a lot,” Rob was quick to explain.

“You know about the birds and the bees?” Jack asked.

“Sure, what would you like to know?” Rob replied.

“We’ll probably have to knock off harvesting timber for a few days to butcher those chickens,” Jack changed the subject (a chicken is a bird).

“Relax Dad, we learned all about it in church,” Rob said. “They got to talking about all of those begats and everyone started sharing information.”

“When did they add sex education to Sunday School?” Jack asked.

“You mean they didn’t talk about stuff like that when you were in Sunday School?” Rob asked.

“To tell you the truth, I can’t remember,” Jack said. “Let’s go see about that permit.”

It turned out to be a good thing that Jack checked with the Forest Service. He had all but over harvested the area he had been working and they had a new area they wanted him to work. They said that there should be enough deadfall in that area to keep him going for a couple of seasons. They also warned him that there were a lot of grizzly bears in the area. When he got that bit of news, Jack stopped in Meeker and bought himself a S & W model 629 stainless with a 5” barrel and two speed loaders. Rob could haul around that Super Blackhawk if he wanted, but this weapon would do him just fine.

Rob bought himself a western rig since that seemed best suited to that style of gun. Besides, he was only 14, what would you expect? Jack bought a more sensible Bianchi model 5BHL Thumbsnap for his revolver. He also bought a 200-round case each of the Winchester 250-grain Supreme Partition Gold ammunition and of the 250-grain Supreme Platinum Tip Hollow point. And, before they started to harvest timber, they spent a little time on a range. That Super Blackhawk was quite a handful for a 14-year-old

boy, but he 'stuck to his gun' and learned to shoot it. After Jack read an article he decided that they would carry the hollow point ammunition.

The model 629 weighted 45.5 oz empty vs. 48 oz for the 7½" barreled Super Blackhawk empty. And, the rig and 24 rounds of ammo worked to pull Rob's pants off. It seemed to him that cowboy guns were for cowboys and he asked if he could shoot his Dad's model 629. The Hogue rubber grips were probably what convinced him that he'd be better off with the Smith and he got Jack to drive him to town to pick up an identical rig to his Dad's. Say, what about the waiting periods? You can't just sell a guy a .44 Magnum 'cause he might kill his neighbor. Naturally there was a waiting period (Not), even when the circumstances were explained. The guy went to the same church.

Harvesting timber during the summer of 2018 was just as much work as the previous year because this year Ed mostly confined his efforts to delivering the firewood. And, he didn't think much of the idea of needing to wear a .44 Magnum just to saw logs. But, he did help them out a little in the beginning by hauling the logs back to the cabin. Then, when the pile of wood was large enough, he loaded the split wood directly into the pickup and trailer and made the deliveries. They knocked off around the kids' birthdays and butchered the chickens. The hogs were going to have to wait until after the first snowfall to meet their maker. For Rob's birthday, they bought him one of the Randall's just like the one Mary had given Jack. Wasn't any good as a hunting knife, but Rob wanted one and he claimed it would come in handy in a bear attack. Yeah, right. Lane wanted clothes to suit the young woman she was becoming. Something about looking nice for church. Uh-huh. Hormones raging are they?

"Farmer's Almanac says we're going to get 20' this year," Ed offered.

"How cold is it going to get?" Jack asked.

"They said to look for new record lows, so I suppose maybe 40° below," Ed replied.

"Dang, that's cold," Jack said.

"Cold?" Ed snapped, "The Bering Sea didn't even thaw this year. You want to see cold, move to Alaska."

"Ed, I think Alaska has already moved to Colorado," Jack chuckled.

"Seen any bear?" Ed asked.

"A few grizz, but Shep barked and they took off," Jack replied.

"What about black bear?" Ed followed up.

"Probably all at the campgrounds looking for handouts," Jack suggested.

“Janice says she’s going to buy a beef this year,” Ed brought up. “I think she has had about all of the game she can choke down.”

“We’ll have real pork come November when those hogs reach market weight,” Jack replied. “I think I’ll have them butchered around 225 pounds.”

“Good because I don’t care what anyone claims, bear tastes like bear,” Ed chuckled. “You going to be able to meet your goal on firewood?”

“Seems likely, Ed,” Jack said. “Unless something unforeseen pops up.”

“You aren’t going to be able to keep this up much longer with that bad leg of yours,” Ed suggested.

“I know, it gets just a little worse each year,” Jack agreed.

“What are you two talking about?” Mary asked joining the men.

“Nothing and everything,” Jack said. “Lane sure is growing up. She really looks nice in that dress.”

“She getting a figure, that’s all,” Mary replied. “Not such a little girl any more is she?”

“You have a talk with her yet?” Jack asked, “You know.”

“Yes, Jack. She asked me what I wanted to know,” Mary laughed.

“They got that in Sunday School,” Jack grouched. “Robbie asked me the same thing.”



## The Loner – Chapter 18 – Grizzly

In addition to carrying that .375 H&H Jack carried his 870 loaded with 1 $\frac{3}{8}$ -ounce slugs. The perennial favorite among shotgun hunters for its accuracy, power, performance, and gun-friendly design. This precisely made rifled slug carried deep, compressible ribs all the way around to guide the slug down the barrel while it protects the choke area. The traditional felt wad is permanently affixed to the rear end of the slug for better aerodynamics and adds an important self-cleaning effect to scrub lead from the bore. Like all Brenneke slugs, it features the unique “arrow” stabilization for truer trajectory and accuracy, which results from the Brenneke “nose cone” design and weight-forward construction. Got the stuff from Cheaper Than Dirt Ammo. It was that imported stuff from Dynamit Nobel-RWS; 3” Magnum with a nice healthy 1 $\frac{3}{8}$  ounce slug. Jack liked the Brenneke slug, maybe because Paul had.

Dumb bear! The grizzly reared up and made a regular fool out of himself snarling and waving his claws. Shep was barking like crazy and Jack was standing next to the pickup getting a drink of water. He reached for the shotgun and turned to square off against the bear. Then, the bear dropped to all fours and charged. Rob had cleared leather with his S&W and between the two of them they stopped that charge in a NY minute. It might be hard to say who actually killed the bear; they each managed to hit it 3 times. Guess it didn't really matter as long as the bear was dead, now did it? They stopped for the day and hauled the carcass to the Department of Wildlife. They were a little shook and didn't feel like eating bear when there was pork to butcher. Besides, that hide was full of holes. After they dropped of the bear at the CDW office they returned home.

“What are you doing home early?” Mary asked.

“Grizz,” Jack muttered.

“Are you both ok?” Mary asked quickly.

“Yeah, that's one bear that won't be bothering anybody,” Jack announced.

“What did you do with the carcass?” Mary asked.

“We dropped it off at the CDW office, Mary. Ed says your Mom is tired of game and the hide was shot to hell anyway,” Jack explained.

“Sit down and tell me all about it,” she insisted.

“What's to tell?” Jack asked. “Ok, I was at the pickup getting a drink of water and Shep started to growl about the same time the grizz reared up. I grabbed the shotgun and Rob pulled his 629. It dropped down and charged and we each shot it 3 times. It never got any closer than 20'.”

This was the third grizzly that they'd had to kill so it wasn't like Jack should be as upset as he was. But, she figured that if there were more to it, she'd better let him tell her in his own good time. A .44 Magnum will kill a grizzly bear; there is no doubt about that. However, a charging grizzly with all of his adrenalin pumping can absorb some heavy-duty punishment. At the range they fired, the bear got almost the full energy of those .44 Magnum rounds and the 3 shotgun slugs, but would 6-rounds from a .44 magnum have been enough to kill the enraged grizzly? Jack didn't know, for sure, although he presumed that it would have. Still, he was shook. Finally, he suggested that until they had the remainder of the timber cut and hauled that Lane come along and ride shotgun. With Ed loading the split wood directly on the pickup anyway, it shouldn't interfere too much with the splitting and they could help stack wood after they came in at night.

Lane and Robbie had been raised practically with a gun in their hand. They had been taught safety and shooting from an early age and both were dead shots. In fact, it was almost a contest between the two of them to see who could shoot better. That varied from day-to-day because neither had any bad habits to unlearn and were equally competent. Mary would have preferred to go herself, but Lane could shoot better than she could and when it came right down to it, she could handle the big logs that still gave Lane a little trouble. They knocked off early that particular day and the dogs got a feast. Mary fed them the bear roast she'd thawed out and fixed spaghetti instead.

Electric pump systems are the only storage systems that eliminate exposure to oxygen. They are also the most expensive, of course. They utilize electric-powered piston pumps to extract air from the container, and seal the container to prevent air from re-entering. And, ideally, they indicate when a vacuum has been achieved. When food is vacuum packed in bags, the effect of the pump is highly visible, because the bags will shape themselves tightly around the food. Not so when vacuum packed in a jar, which is when a vacuum gauge is most helpful and will keep the jar from imploding. In order to maintain the vacuum, containers are constructed of special materials, which provide an oxygen barrier. Proper vacuum packaging makes food last 3-5 times longer in a freezer. What do vacuum pumps have to do with shooting a grizz? Nothing, but I got to thinking about storing that pork and well, it was as good a time as any to research vacuum sealers.

Most solid pieces of meat will store 6 months wrapped in plastic and freezer paper. Now if you vacuum seal it, it is anybody's guess. As long as you don't lose that vacuum, quite a while; up to 3 years according to some sources but only for 1 year according to others. So 2 hogs are going to equal 4 hams, a bunch of bacon and a whole lot of poke chops. You can smoke those picnics, too and get yourself some extra 'ham'. Jack didn't have time to smoke the meat so he was going to let them do it at the locker plant when he took the hogs in to be butchered. Didn't need no vacuum pump neither, at least not for the pork. Are a hog and a side of beef and 52 chickens enough to feed a family for a year? Got some left over bear and some venison if it isn't.

Lane wasn't too happy about riding shotgun. She figured that they would cut down her share because she wasn't engaged in manual labor. Jack tried to reassure her that not

getting their butts chewed off was just as important to the project as hauling wood. But, if she wanted, she could stack the wood by herself when they got back home at night. Very persuasive argument, she'd be up until midnight if she had to stack the wood by herself. Next year, Jack told her, they'd be taking both of the dogs and she could stay and help Mary. Lane said she wanted another dog in that case.

That new dog was going to have to wait until later, but Jack was sure that he knew where the dog was coming from. That young man that Lane was partial to was from the family where they'd gotten Ranger. Well, they were 15 now and Mary had been right. Lane looked pretty grown up in that figure hugging dress. Fortunately it wasn't one she could wear to church and give her fella an eye full. Jack didn't realize it but the kids were way ahead of him. On Friday morning Mary got a call from the young man's mother. There was a dance and what did Mary think about Andy asking Lane to go. She'd chaperone so there was nothing to be concerned about. Mary said yes and that Lane would be back and expecting a call at 7.

"Is she old enough to date?" Jack asked.

"Yes and Andy's mother will chaperone so there's nothing to be concerned about," Mary replied.

"Well, ok, I guess," Jack said. Saturday night, Jack was singing another tune.

"Are you going to let her go out in that?" he asked.

"What's wrong with it, I think it is perfectly charming," Mary answered.

"But it's so revealing!" Jack protested referring to that form fitting dress.

I believe it's what they call a sheath, but I'm not sure. Jack preferred to think of it as a dress by Glidden. They had to knock early that Saturday so Lane could get ready for the dance. But, with her watching their backs, they seemed to be moving more quickly and they could use the rest. It's funny about parents. When the children are little, they can't seem to wait for them to grow up. And, when they grow up, they suddenly wish they were children again. At least that description fitted Jack. Get used to it Jack, they're 15 and in 3 years they will be off to college. Probably not Harvard, the University of Colorado seemed more likely, but it had the original campus in Boulder, plus a campus in Colorado Springs and Denver and that campus at the former Fitzsimons Medical Center in Aurora. Besides, Andy was a respectable young man and an honors student at Meeker High. What you had to watch out for Jack is if they decided to go to the same campus.

"I figure that I'm going to give up harvesting timber except for what we need when the kids go to college," Jack announced. "My leg isn't getting any better and without the kids to help, it's going to be all I can do to harvest 50 cords of wood. Are we accumulating any money in the bank?"

“Yes of course,” Mary replied. “We’ve managed to save half our share of the income from the firewood and you have the money from selling the business. We’ll be ok.”

“I don’t know,” Jack said, “In three years that pickup will be about worn out.”

We don’t really have all that many expenses, dear,” Mary said. “All we have is property taxes, satellite TV and the fuel we burn. The amount we spend on groceries doesn’t amount to that much. The phone bill is low because we rarely make a long distance call. I suppose it will go up once the kids go to college, but if we’re carefully it won’t be too bad.”

“I have that little pension too from the disability, don’t forget,” Jack reminded her. “It’s not very much, but every penny counts.”

“How much longer are you going to get that?” Mary asked.

“I have no idea,” Jack replied. “The first follow up exam was at 3 years and the second 7 years later. I’m on a 7-year cycle now because that leg isn’t going to get any better. And back when I had that last exam, I wasn’t in the condition I am now.”

“When did you get hurt?” Mary asked.

“In 2003, and the first follow up exam was in 2006 and the second in 2013,” Jack replied. “I guess that means that the next exam will be in about 2 years.”

“Hi Mom, hi Dad,” Lane called as she entered.

“Did you have a good time, honey?” Mary asked.

“Dreamy,” Lane replied.

“I suppose he had his hands all over you, huh?” Jack inquired.

“Oh Dad, he was a perfect gentleman,” Lane explained.

“When am I going to get to meet this young man of yours?” Jack asked.

“You see him every Sunday at church, what do you mean meet him?” Lane asked.

“Yes, but we’ve never been formally introduced,” Jack said.

“Knock it off Jack, you know Andy perfectly well,” Mary chuckled. “Don’t worry about your Dad, Lane he’s just doing his father thing.”

“Dad, you’re so square,” Lane said and left to change into her nightgown.

“Square?” Jack said, “I didn’t know kids these days even knew what square meant.”

“She was just speaking your language dear,” Mary smiled.

“More like my grandfather’s language,” Jack laughed.

“But, you understood, right?” Mary said.

“Well, yeah,” Jack admitted.

“Then I guess that she made her point,” Mary smiled.

It took Jack a couple of days to quit watching his back. Not that he figured that Lane wouldn’t, but he had been ‘very fatherly’. He got over that when another grizzly showed up and Lane shot between its feet before it even saw them. Well, the grizzly took off like he’d actually been shot and Jack relaxed a whole lot. Lane had pumped that 870 and had a dead aim on that bear in a blink of an eye. Lane had even aced out Shep, firing before he could bark. It didn’t take them all that much longer to finish cutting timber for the year. And, to tell the truth, Jack wasn’t looking forward to the next 3 years. Rob had grabbed for his gun, not his knife on both occasions, confirming that you should never take a knife to a gunfight and that he wasn’t serious about why he wanted the Randall.

Jack realized that he had made a mistake buying the model 629 revolver. It wasn’t rated for the +P+ cartridges and they needed a little more firepower for those grizzly bears. He heard that Ruger made a 5½” barreled Redhawk and it was rated for the +P+ ammo. So, he went back to the dealer and bought 2 of the Redhawks, stainless steel with 5½” barrels. The dealer listened to his story about the bear and recommended something called Buffalo Bore Ammunition. They had a 340 gr. LBT-LFN GC cartridge that the dealer said would generate 1478 fps and muzzle energy of 1649 ft. lbs. The 250-grain JHP Winchester ammo only generated 1250fps with muzzle energy of 867 ft. lbs. The Redhawk weighted in at a hefty 49 ounces, but that extra weight would be needed for the extra recoil. Of course that meant more leather and speed loaders, but it was worth it. The S&W took a size 9 5BHL while the Redhawk took a size 12. At least the speed loaders were interchangeable. The model 29M fit the 629, the Dan Wesson, both versions of the Redhawk and the Colt Anaconda.

Now the entire family had a .44 Magnum. The ladies inherited the 629’s and Rob and he would carry the Redhawks with those +P+ cartridges. There hadn’t been any sign of bears around the cabin so Jack was comfortable with the women having the lighter, less powerful handguns. Then they went out to try the new handguns. They were really comfortable to shoot with the Winchester ammo, but that +P+ stuff was a handful and more. On the other hand, if it stopped a grizzly dead in its tracks, it was a small sacrifice. Besides, he was getting older and didn’t hear so well anyway. Can you spell KA-BOOM?

The funny thing about it was that the Rugers were less expensive than the S&W 629’s. As a point of comparison, the Winchester 300 grain .375 H&H cartridge generates

2530fps and muzzle energy of 4265 ft. lbs. And a 1-ounce (437.5 grain) Winchester slug jumped out of the barrel at between 1600-1760fps depending upon whether it was a 2¾" or a 3" shell. Those Brenneke slugs weighed 601.5 grains and were 3" Magnums. So maybe only 1600fps, but you can see why some people prefer a shotgun to stop a grizzly. And at that range, the slug was probably still pretty close to muzzle velocity. And yes, the Colt Anaconda is a darn fine firearm, in case you're wondering. The 6" model only weighs 53 ounces. But Colt revolvers tend to develop timing problems with extended use. I've owned a couple of Pythons, a 2½" and a 4" barrel. Pretty guns and pretty darned expensive. And, unfortunately the Anaconda isn't rated for +P+ ammo.

"We're never going to accumulate any money if you keep running to town and buying more guns," Mary observed.

"Next time, I'll let the bear eat me," Jack retorted.

"You know what I mean," Mary snapped.

"Yes, I do," Jack said, "But honey, we put enough lead in that grizzly to stop a tank. I'd much more prefer to have a portable cannon strapped on than hope I can make it to the truck and the shotgun. Besides, having Lane standing guard is a waste of energy. Only 3 more seasons and I'm giving this gig up."

"I'll sure be glad when the weather gets back to normal," Mary changed the subject.

"I'll just be happy if we live long enough to see that happen," Jack countered.

"What do you mean by live that long?" Mary asked.

"Well, dear, if those scientists were right, this could last for decades," Jack explained.

"It's so cold outside too," Mary complained.

"I could be wrong, but I think that Alamosa has the lowest temperatures in the state," Jack commented. "They've recorded lows of -42 in December and -50 in January. And the database I look at only went up to 1998."

"Alamosa, CO – Elevation 7,546 feet – Denver 251.7 miles. At this location there was originally a small family community called Bravo. The first residents migrated north from New Mexico and some of the first non-Indian settlements in Colorado are in the area. Alamosa means "Cottonwoods" in Spanish and the trees line the banks of the Rio Grande through town. After its initial rowdy phase, Alamosa evolved into a quiet town and managed to escape the crime phase of other frontier towns. Seems you were either just passing through or you owned a farm and raised a family in the area.

"Alamosa lies in the San Luis Valley along the banks of the northern Rio Grande. It is the largest city in the valley and most anything moving in the area goes through here.

Surrounding the valley are some of the most scenic mountains in the world. The valley, or park, is over 7,500 feet in elevation and the winters get long and cold. Often Alamosa has the low temperature in the nation and one day it reached 50 below.”

“Brrr,” Mary shuttered at the thought. “I heard you say that Alaska moved to Colorado. Maybe Alamosa just moved to Meeker.”

Looking for Alamosa on the map? It’s on US highway 160.

Authors Note: Yes, I read the comments. Sorry about getting in a hurry and buying the 629’s instead of the Redhawks, I knew better. Never heard of those +P+ loads, though. 'Poke Chops' isn't a typo. Thanks.

## The Loner – Chapter 19 – Shakespeare

I think it's an awful name for a dog. That's some scary story!!! It was 'Shakespeare in Love', with Kathy Ireland. Anyway, Andy told Lane that their dog was expecting puppies. Got tagged by a German Shepherd purebred so the puppies would be purebred, too. She immediately put dibs on the largest male in the litter. Now Andy felt about Lane the way that Lane felt about Andy, so you could count on her getting her wish.

They weren't quite done when the first snow came on Labor Day. But, it wasn't so heavy that they had to use the Snow Cat and Rob and Jack finished hauling in the wood. Then, they took over the splitting chores and delivered the final loads. When they were done, they realized as much money as the previous year, even though they'd delivered less firewood. Their gross was the same and their expenses lower so all five of them made a nice deposit into their bank accounts. Ed announced that he wouldn't be helping the coming year. All of it was just getting to be too much for him. Besides, Janice and he didn't need the money. Janice had plenty and he had some savings plus a pension and Social Security. He'd started the Social Security early because it made sense mathematically, he claimed.

Around the US and in Europe during the winter of 2018-2019, the temperatures hit record lows and the snow accumulations hit record highs. They even got a foot of snow in Los Angeles. And, places in California like the Antelope Valley looked more like northern Iowa during a bad winter. Of course, all of this was taking a terrible toll on the production of food. Argentina and Australia were doing their best to supply beef and lamb and the like, but they simply couldn't keep up with the demand. Forget about going to the grocery store and buying meat, assuming they had any; you couldn't afford it unless your name was Rockefeller. The reduction in health problems pertaining to the reduction of consumption of red meat was more than offset by additional cases of pneumonia and cases of frostbite.

In the northern tier of states, they were having all kinds of problems. Fuel oil shortages continued and those electrical lines got so cold that they snapped in heavy winds. In places like Alaska, they were used to cold weather and they were doing a whole lot better than those folks in the lower 48. Some cities were long accustomed to heavy snowfalls and they had the equipment to clear the streets. It wasn't doing them much good, however, because it was snowing faster than they could keep up with it, and where did you dump that much snow? If it ever did warm up, there wouldn't be any problem with subsoil moisture for a long time to come. On the other hand, the soil can only hold so much water and after a few years of the worsening winters, the US was experiencing some of the worst floods in history. There is a whole lot more to bad weather, e.g., a cooling trend and extra moisture, because all of that moisture needs somewhere to go.

The White House declared a 'War on Weather'. Well, what did you expect with the Republicans were in power? But Mother Nature wasn't negotiating and there was no one to shoot. Except grizz, out in Colorado in the summer. There were a whole lot of those environmental freaks saying, 'we told you so', but that didn't raise the temperature nor



stop the snow. Nature was righting herself by the only way she knew how. The ice caps were reforming at the poles and in the northern areas of the globe so there probably was an end in sight.

On the other hand, it was getting hard to harvest coal and other fossil fuels. And all of that snow prevented a lot of people from driving their cars and trucks as much. So the government did the only thing it could and authorized the construction of several nuclear reactors to generate electricity plus created tax incentives for solar and wind generated energy. Do you know how long it takes to build a reactor? The government blamed the environmentalists for all of its problems and eliminated Environmental Impact Statements, cutting the construction time significantly. You see, that was the problem with Environmentalists; they wanted it both ways. How many of them drove hydrogen-burning cars?

You can't build this or that here because some darned bug that nobody ever heard of is an endangered species. And, you can't cut timber even though it's a renewable resource because of some darned owl or something. And the hydrocarbon problem would eventually resolve itself anyway when there wasn't any more oil to pump out of the ground. Of course it still took a long time to build a reactor because they had to build them safer. That didn't necessarily eliminate the problem with the spent fuel rods, but there was plenty of room in the place in Nevada. Which gets right back to people wanting things both ways. They didn't want pollution but they wanted electricity. A properly built reactor was perfectly safe if the technicians knew what they were doing. But, the reactors consumed fuel rods and people didn't want those spent fuel rods going down THEIR highway.

And, even if you could build a jillion wind turbines and solar panels, you still had to distribute the electricity. Back in November of 2004, the state of California announced that they were expecting more energy problems because of the Public Utilities Commission.

It's the infrastructure people; it is in terrible shape. And the Democrat party held the White House from 1992-2000 and again in 2008-2016, so why wasn't that addressed? Well they were too busy banning guns and high capacity magazines to address the real issues facing the United States. And the Republicans weren't one darned bit better, to tell you the truth. George wouldn't sign the Kyoto Accord, claiming 'we could do it better'. I'm not playing favorites here, all of the politicians were to blame and that blame fell right back on the American public. I don't care what anyone says, 'you can't have your cake and eat it, too'. It's all the fault of those 'Special Interests'. But there are so many 'Special Interests', which one do you blame? Energy companies or the people who use their products? Think about it.

Christmas 2018 in Colorado was special in that it wasn't special. There weren't any expensive gifts because the price of everything had risen to a point that it was tough enough just buying food and fuel. Then again, it wasn't one of those 'Gift of the Magi' events either. It was what one might call a practical Christmas with an exchange of necessities, like clothing and such. It was cold and it snowed a lot, but Shakespeare was

born in March and Lane could hardly wait to pick him up. Jack had finally gotten over acting like a father; Andy was a pretty nice kid. Rob was talking about maybe applying for one of the Service schools but since he had been home educated that would probably only happen with a Congressional Appointment.

Being home educated wasn't necessarily a problem because Lane and Rob were both considered to be students of the Meeker School system. Where Rob fell short was on the extracurricular activities, which were considered in the admissions process. Pretty hard to participate in extracurricular activities when you are home schooled. There are many ways around this, including attending college for a year, so Rob didn't consider that to be a terrible handicap. Besides, the Academies considered your SAT and or ACT scores and Lane and Rob were especially well prepared in that department.

"Are you going to cut production again this year?" Mary asked. "The price of firewood is up to \$250 a cord."

"I don't think so, we can use the extra money to cover those guns I bought and inflation," Jack replied.

"Those are some hand cannons," Mary laughed. "I had earplugs and the electronic sound suppressors and they still were loud."

"They are a handful, I'll give you that," Jack agreed. "Is Lane going to housebreak this dog or am I going to have to start wearing goulashes?"

"He's almost there, give him a break," Mary urged.

"Junior learned faster than he is," Jack insisted, "Lane needs to pay more attention. But, on the original subject of firewood, I think that we'll try and sell 300 cords a year until the kids go to college or wherever they're going."

"Rob is talking about a service academy," Mary said.

"I know and I'm not sure if I support that or not," Jack replied. "The thing is he'll end up being a career soldier and I don't know that I like that idea."

"Why not? It's an honorable profession," Mary asked.

"Darned good way to get your butt shot off, too" Jack said.

"First you're worried about Lane dating and now you don't want Rob to go into the service," Mary summarized. "Lighten up Jack and let them grow up."

"Danged dog," Jack said getting up and stepping in a puddle. "Lane you have another mess to clean up!"

They got into the woods sooner and would probably end up harvesting more wood than Jack planned on, especially if the winter came later. Jack got the chainsaws serviced, which included doing the carburetor, and replacing the chain, sprocket and sparkplug. There was an absolute limit to how many times you could sharpen those blades, eventually you simply ran out of metal. And, a dull saw was 10 times as much work. He decided to take the tracks off the Snow Cat and use it on its wheels. They could get into the forest the minute the snow was gone and as long as they weren't wading mud, could get a lot more accomplished.

That meant using the trailer, but it held twice as much wood. Jack also intended to go back to the Forest Service and see about getting a different area to harvest next year. He didn't much care for the bears in this area and sooner or later, they were going to mean trouble. So, they were in the woods by the middle of May. One thing led to another and they ended up cutting more wood per day than at any time before. Of course, Rob was getting bigger and he was putting out more work, so maybe that accounted for it. Jack would have expected to see several grizzly bears, but by the middle of June, they had yet to see their first. When they were several trailer loads of wood ahead, Mary and Lane started splitting the wood.

Jack hadn't realized how much help Ed had been, until they got into the summer of 2019. Rob and he were really going to town and they ended up needing to stop and split wood so they had someplace to put more. This freed up Mary to make the deliveries and with Lane helping her, they were much faster than Ed. In no time, there was more than enough room to stack more logs and Jack and Rob went back to the forest. On their very first day back, a grizzly walked up and reared up. Shep and Ranger were barking their heads off and that immediately got Rob and Jack's attention. That bear stood there and postured for the better part of a half hour before he changed his mind and left.

This whole routine turned into a regular practice. They'd saw logs and haul them to the cabin where Mary and Lane would split and stack them. Eventually, they'd run out of room and have to spell Mary and Lane so they could deliver the firewood. Then, they'd get back to the forest and run into another bear. It wasn't always a grizzly, either, sometimes it was just a black, but they could be just as dangerous. The only time they took off was Sundays because there was no way that Lane would let them miss church. Jack had been so busy that he hadn't been keeping track of the amount of firewood they'd produced.

Ed did come over and haul the 25 cords for him and Janice, making the third stint in the woods a little longer. Doesn't time fly when you're having fun? Lane had stacked their 25 cords, actually 24, they had a cord left over from the winter, and had filled the pickup trailer and pickup with wood. Mary let Lane drive because of the requirements that she had to meet to get a driver's license in Colorado. Persons under age 18 must hold an instruction permit for at least twelve months and be 16 years old before they are eligible to take a driving test. Minors are given credit for any time they held a permit in this or any other state if they show the permit documentation. Jack had let Rob drive to and

from church since getting his permit and he had the required hours. Lane was a little short, but had caught up by her 16th birthday. They took the day off on Friday, August 16th and the kids' got their licenses.

That made a big difference for their firewood business. With Lane being able to make the deliveries and Mary splitting and stacking the wood, they could go 6 weeks before the guys had to knock off and split wood and let the gals make the deliveries. Hey fellas, don't be fooled by Mary's good looks, I sure as hell wouldn't want to get in a fight with a woman who spent all day all summer picking up and splitting logs. I guess that you could probably say the same thing about Lane, she wasn't related by blood, but she was every bit the good looker as her Mom was. The guys came in around the first of October for the season. They finished splitting the firewood and Mary and Lane made the deliveries.

"I'm tired," Jack groaned.

"You should be, I am too," Mary acknowledged. "Do you have any idea how much wood we harvested and sold this year?"

"I'm sure we matched last year," Jack muttered.

"Jack, we sold 455 cords of wood at \$250 a cord," Mary explained.

"What? I was only planning on cutting 350 cords and selling 300, why didn't you stop me?" Jack asked.

"I tried to tell you a couple of times, but you were too tired to listen," Mary said defensively.

"So, how much did we clear?" Jack asked.

"Do the math, Jack. It costs us about \$15 a cord to harvest and deliver the wood. That makes \$235 clear times 455 cords or \$106,925 to divide 4 ways," Mary said.

"I feel like I did 2 years' worth of work this summer," Jack chuckled, "So I guess that's about right. How much is that apiece?"

"Rob and Lane will each get \$26,731.25 for their college funds and we, sir, are looking at a nice fat \$53,462.50," Mary grinned.

"Jeez, that means that we've just fattened our retirement account by about \$40,000," Jack said.

"Don't get used to it, honey, the kids will be leaving for college year after next and that will be a short year," Mary reminded him. "Once they leave for college, I'll take Rob's place in the woods and help you cut the logs. And, you can take Lane's place and deliv-

er the lumber we spit. Figure one more good year and a shorter year after, when the kids leave.”

“Rob said today that if he didn’t go to a service academy, he’d come home during the summers and help so he could make money for college,” Jack announced. “So, it could be that that retirement I’ve been looking forward to might get delayed for 4 more years.

John ‘Jack’ Summers turned 26 years old on March 1, 2004, meaning his date of birth was March 1, 1978. I never mentioned Mary’s birthdate, but suffice it to say that she was only a few months younger than Jack. That meant that during the past summer, Jack had been 41 years old. No way you could retire at 43, Jack, and 4 more years would only make you 47. Yeah, I know it’s been a tough life, especially for some who is disabled, but you may lose that disability if you don’t knock off all of the hard work, you’re the picture of health. And that 7-year Disability exam is in 2020, remember?

Hey Jack, I’ve got some good news and some bad news. It was costing the government just too much money to keep scheduling those exams because once you got through a 3-year and 7-year exam, you rarely were no longer disabled; and the bad news? Oh, if you got the same injury today, they’d check you every year assuming you even qualified for disability. So the good news-bad news was nothing but good news unless you got injured again at which time you would be totally reevaluated. And, if that happened, you’d better be pretty badly disabled. Be real careful with that chainsaw and don’t let the bears get you.

Lane finally had Shakespeare full potty trained, so there were no more puddles. That was a better name for the dog, Puddles, but Lane had her heart set on calling him Shakespeare. At about 6 months of age Shakespeare was proving to have pretty good line, too. He sure didn’t like that bear-rug they had in the main room of the cabin. The snow came later this fall, letting them go out after the first snow fall and harvest another 3 weeks’ worth of wood. They kept it on hand for any late season customers.

“Daddy, since I have my driver’s license now can I drive the pickup into town and see Andy?” Lane asked.

“I suppose so if you limit your trips to the daylight hours and the road is good, yes,” Jack acquiesced. “But, you carry that shotgun in case you run into any bears.”

“Oh, Daddy, there won’t be any bears on the road,” Lane protested.

“Maybe not, but that’s the deal, take it or leave it,” Jack said.

Are you sure you didn’t mean wolves, Jack? Of the 2-legged persuasion? Still being a father figure, huh?

Janice, Mary and Jack were still technically Special Reserve Deputy Sheriff’s. There hadn’t been any trouble in a long time and the Sheriff hadn’t called upon them, but

Janice was still his eyes and ears in that part of the county. And although Ed wasn't technically a Deputy, he might as well have been, he spent as much time 'keeping an eye on the neighborhood' as Janice did. If Janice had a shortcoming it was that she tended, at times, to be a busybody. But Ed kept her in check and they rarely called the Sheriff unless they were sure something was wrong.

During the first part of December, Janice announced that she was tired of driving a pickup and that she was willing to sell it to them for just what the dealer would allow her as a trade-in allowance. There are two Blue Books, wholesale and retail and she was thinking wholesale. That was too good of an offer to pass up and Jack and Mary bought the pickup for cash. There went part of that retirement money, but if he were going to work 4 years longer, he'd need a better set of wheels. Besides, with 2 pickups, they wouldn't have the delivery problems they'd had this past summer.

You remember Mary's car, right. Her old junker that was on its last legs at the beginning of the story and burned gasoline? They'd junked it and only had that pickup of Jack's. Jack had bought it used in 2008 and it was really showing its age. It was still good for hauling the logs in from the forest, but having Janice's GMC would give them something better to put on the road. Jack's truck was permanently locked into 4-wheel drive anyway.